

SET YOURSELF UP  
*for Your*

# BEST YEAR EVER



THE 8 STRATEGIES SUPER-SUCCESSFUL  
HIGH ACHIEVERS USE TO PREPARE FOR THE NEW YEAR

MICHAEL HYATT

# IT'S THE END OF THE YEAR.

What are you going to do to make next year better than the one before?

I asked several high achievers what they do to set themselves up for a great year, people like Tony Robbins, Jeff Walker, Chalene Johnson, and Dave Ramsey. As their responses came in, I was surprised by how much their answers overlapped.

**But then again, I really wasn't *that* surprised.**

The overlaps function like best practices. I counted eight of them, and I'm convinced these commonalities are part of what makes these people all high achievers in the first place.

As we're ending this year, it's worth looking at how these best practices can help the rest of us become high achievers as well.

# I. REFLECT ON THE PAST YEAR

The first thing high achievers do to set themselves up for a great year is review the current one.

“I set myself up for success in the New Year by pausing and reflecting,” [John Maxwell](#) told me. “I block the last week of the year and spend time reviewing my entire year’s calendar. I believe that evaluated reflection turns experience into insight. So, I evaluate what I did so that I gain insight for what I should be doing in the New Year.”



*“Evaluated reflection turns experience into insight.”*

—JOHN MAXWELL





[Tony Robbins](#) does the same thing. He told me that throughout the year he collects “accomplishments and magic moments” in a journal—almost like saving up receipts for tax purposes. “At the end of the year I go and review them all,” he said. “I look at the area of our businesses, our relationships, finance, and family.” By reflecting on these magic moments, Tony is able to “pull some principles” and determine “what do we really want to make happen in the following year.”

This kind of reflection doesn’t have to take an entire week. [Skip Prichard](#) reserves one day for this review process. “I set aside a full day with no interruptions and spend it in reflection, contemplation and prayer,” said Skip.



[Daniel Harkavy](#) also uses one day, “to read through my journal, my calendar from the current year and year ahead, my business vision, and then revise my Life Plan.” He added, “This time sets me up best to make the critical decisions I need to make to live the most purposeful life I can in the year ahead.”



## 2. STAY POSITIVE

High achievers also work to stay positive as they lean into the New Year.



“The most important thing I do at the beginning of a new year is leave the old year where it fell,” [Jon Acuff](#) told me. “It’s good to learn from the year you just lived, but if you stare at it too long, regret over the opportunities you missed or mistakes you made will blossom.”

Regret and negativity can kill our drive. Reviewing the “magic moments,” as Tony Robbins does, tells us that staying positive in this review process can help us move forward without losing momentum.

[Jeff Walker](#) told me that he does this by “reviewing all my ‘wins’ for the prior year. Too often we don’t recognize all the progress we’ve made and all the great stuff we’ve accomplished.” Focusing on the wins, he said, “puts you in the positive state of mind to look forward and plan the next year.”



Skip Prichard's process is similar. "I almost never think about what went wrong or the negative side because I believe we should build on our strengths," he said.

[Andy Andrews](#) said something that shows how important this is and how far we need to go to keep negativity at bay. "I find a quiet place to be alone and have a forgiveness session," he said. "I scour my heart clean in preparation for the New Year by forgiving those I need to forgive. And I always include that person who often seems to disappoint me most . . . myself."



*“I scour my heart clean in preparation for the New Year by forgiving those I need to forgive.”*

—ANDY ANDREWS

# 3. EXPRESS GRATITUDE

The third thing high achievers do to set themselves up for a great year, one that came up in the answers several times, was to express gratitude. And this is especially helpful in staying positive.



To do this, [Erik Fisher](#) even starts his New Year’s preparation at Thanksgiving time. “I enjoy taking the Thanksgiving Holiday to be thankful for all the positive things that happened over the past year, as well as assess how I can change my perspective on the negative things that happened to a healthy one,” said Erik.

“This sets up the time between the end of November through New Years day as part celebration and part solitude and pondering and closing up old business. Doing this is like starting the New Year with an empty in-basket.”

[Ray Edwards](#) said he starts preparing with “a gratitude flood.” How so? “In my journal I write down every good thing I can remember from the past year. In that state of total gratitude I ask, ‘What do I most want to be thankful for one year from now?’ I write the answer down, and it becomes a focus for the new year.”



*“What do I most want to be thankful for one year from now?”*

—RAY EDWARDS

Research tells us that gratitude has a measurable affect on achieving our goals so it would seem that counting our blessings is a good way to start a great year.



“I set myself up for a great year by writing down fifty things I’m grateful for,” [Robert D. Smith](#) told me. “I find that taking time to count my blessings keeps my mind focused on helping others and achieving even more than last year.”

[Jon Gordon](#) tries to stay in this spirit all year. “I take a daily walk of gratitude,” he said. “While walking I practice gratitude and pray. The research shows you can’t be stressed and thankful at the same time.” He added, “If you do this walk just one day, you won’t experience a huge benefit. But if you do it daily, you’ll notice incredible benefits and major life change.”





## 4. ELIMINATE THE EXCESS

One of the things that comes from reflection is direction for the New Year. I heard that from several high achievers. But I also heard that spending time to reflect can highlight the stuff we need to cut. And eliminating the excess is the fourth thing that high achievers do to set themselves up for a great year.

“I set myself up for a great year by ruthlessly eliminating the bottom 30 percent of activities, projects, and commitments from the previous year,” Ray Edwards told me. “By removing those from my calendar, I get space to focus on the activities with the biggest payoff.”



[Jeff Goins](#) echoed the point. By killing the underperforming tasks and projects, he said, “It opens up all kinds of room for me to be more creative and innovative without running out of margin.”

[Derek Halpern](#) is relentless about this. “I review my previous year and decide what I won’t do in the upcoming year,” Derek said. “And I don’t just quit things I hate. I try to quit things I love that aren’t delivering the results I want. In other words, I kill my darlings.”



*“I try to quit things I love that aren’t  
delivering the results I want.”*

—DEREK HALPERN



## 5. SET COMPELLING GOALS

This one came out in several of the answers in different ways, but the bottom line is that high achievers set goals that harness their emotional energy. “I set myself up to win by setting a clear vision for what I want to accomplish this coming year and why I want to accomplish it,” [Lewis Howes](#) told me. The power is in that word *why*.



Tony Robbins’ review process is designed to access this emotional power. “It’s really a recapturing of the year, emotionally and psychologically,” he said. It’s about identifying “what we achieved and what we enjoyed and then laying out of what we’re going to achieve and enjoy in the next year.” Notice the importance of enjoyment there.



[Dave Ramsey](#) told me something similar: “I have to intentionally stop and dream again. What can I work on next year that makes me smile? Then my mind automatically moves from the strategic to the tactical. In detail—how can I organize my work and my life to do the things that cause that same smile?”

*“How can I organize my work and my life to do the things that cause that same smile?”*

—DAVE RAMSEY

Similarly, Ray Edwards said he meditates on this question: “In the next twelve months, what must I become or do so that I grow in every area of life—and how can I enjoy the process?”



To make sure his goals are compelling, [Ryan Blair](#) tries to visualize them. “I draft my script for the next year,” he told me. “I write it like a movie that takes place with a scene in each season. When I can visualize it, I can achieve it.”

High achievers tap that emotional energy in other ways too. [Andrew Warner](#) journals until he finds his core commitments. “I set myself up for a great year by doing intense journaling about my mission,” he said. He then reduces that to “about four things that I’m committed to focusing on, even if it means other parts of my life will suffer.”



[Crystal Paine](#) uses the SMART technique to make her goals compelling. After reviewing her year, she and her husband discuss the areas she wants to grow. “Based upon this conversation, I then map out specific and measurable yearly goals,” she told me. “This helps me to begin the year with purpose and clear direction.”



## 6. BREAK IT DOWN

The sixth thing high achievers do is take those compelling goals and chunk them down into manageable pieces.



You already heard Andrew Warner boils his down to four. [Lysa TerKeurst](#) breaks her goals down into three categories: giving, family, and personal development. I especially like her personal development category. “This is a great year to become an expert on something,” she said about this one. “By pre-deciding what that something is, I can become a strategic student and an eventual expert.”

[Chris Ducker](#) starts with a few big goals for the year, “usually no more than three.” He then writes them down and displays them in his office. But he doesn’t stop there. “I break them down into four quarterly goals—which are good-sized wins on their own!—and then break those up into monthly goals,” he said. “This enables me to stay focused on the long-term goals, while at the same time enjoying being ‘in the moment’ of achieving my short-term, monthly goals. It’s a system that has worked for me for six years now!”



[Casey Graham](#) puts a lot of focus into his quarterly goals. “I feel like I’m able to accomplish more when they are shorter term,” he told me. “I have a list of long-term accomplishments that the quarterly goals are helping me achieve.”



Once my goals are set, I resolve by cutting off all other options except what I wrote down for the next ninety days.”



Seeing the mission in miniature makes it manageable. “Every day is an opportunity to move forward,” as [Pat Flynn](#) told me.

[Chris Brogan](#) put it this way: “My great years are built on keeping a bigger mission in front of me, but looking at my daily actions as the ‘molecules’ of that mission. Your day is your week is your month is your year. Best years come from best efforts performed daily.”



*“Your day is your week is your month is your year.”*

—CHRIS BROGAN

## 7. SCHEDULE THE YEAR

Once they've set their goals and broken them into manageable pieces, the seventh thing high achievers do is schedule them. What gets scheduled gets done, I often say. Beyond that, scheduling also protects your time. Here's the reality: Everyone has an agenda. If you don't declare yours by calendaring what's what important to you, others will try to fit you into their agenda.



“I block out calendar time for my most important outcomes—vacations, fun and time off and major business and creative projects,” [Marie Forleo](#) told me. “Those ‘stakes in the ground’ ensure that what’s most important happens.”

[Amy Porterfield](#) explained her process in depth. “I buy a big dry-erase wall calendar and map out my entire year,” she said. “I include promotions, launches, and special content campaigns. Plus, I make a point to block out all vacation and days-off.”

Amy continued, “There’s usually a lot of writing and erasing to get it right! Seeing the big picture in advance allows me to work with more purpose throughout the year.”



*“Seeing the big picture in advance allows me to work with more purpose throughout the year.”*

—AMY PORTERFIELD



This planning stage is where he gets “very tactical and practical,” [Stu McLaren](#) told me. “I begin working backwards from the end goal and outline what that means on a quarterly basis, monthly basis and weekly basis.”

Of course, going into that kind of detail can be overwhelming. To combat that feeling, Stu said he uses a trick from Gary Keller: “I then answer the question, ‘What is the one thing I can do, such that by doing it, everything else will become easier or unnecessary?’ I’ve found the answer to this question brings tremendous clarity. It simplifies my ‘next steps.’”

## 8. UNPLUG FOR A TIME

I found it interesting that both Marie Forleo and Amy Porterfield mentioned scheduling their vacations as part of planning for their year. They are both intentional about taking time away to refresh and recharge. Several years ago I started taking a month-long sabbatical. To make it work, I have to plan it a year in advance, but it's a crucial part of having a great year for me.

I heard this from other high achievers, especially as part of preparing for the year. “The single most important thing I do to set myself up for the best year ever is take the last two weeks of December off,” [Andy Stanley](#) told me.



*“The single most important thing I do...is take the last two weeks of December off.”*

—ANDY STANLEY

“I set myself up for a great year by taking a mini-sabbatical the last fourteen days of the current year,” said Ray Edwards. “That means no work of any kind. Those fourteen days are set aside for God, family, and fun. This way I start the new year refreshed, revived, and renewed.”



There are some important side benefits in setting aside time as well. Unplugging makes room for others in ways that we can't always plan. [Chalene Johnson](#) told me that she was taking off the month of December. Her kids' sports schedule won't permit any travel, she said, but the decision made room for something out of the blue.

The day after we talked about her sabbatical a friend was in a horrible accident. “I've had the privilege of caring for her and her family and helping her with her business,” Chalene told me. “Certainly it's something I could have done even if there was work on my plate,” she said, “but because I had created a clear schedule, it allowed me to care for my friend without causing undue stress to my own business or to my family.”





# BEST PRACTICES

There's a lot that goes into having your best year ever, and some things are different for us all. After all, we all have different talents, aspirations, and circumstances.

But these insights and disciplines from high achievers show us eight of the best practices we can all follow to accomplish the things that matter most in each of our lives this coming year. I dig into these and more in my [5 Days to Your Best Year Ever](#) and show how you can begin applying them to your own life so you can become a high achiever yourself in 2015.

