



**THE HERO
HAND
BOOK**

NATE GREEN

The Hero Handbook

**A Crash-Course in Building a Badass
Body, Getting Your Shit Together, and
Living the Life of Your Dreams**

By Nate Green

<http://www.thenategreenexperience.com>

What to Expect From This Book

Reading this handbook should feel like we're having a face-to-face conversation. We both have a drink in our hand, the bar is pretty much empty, and we're talking about how to live the good life and become better people.

This book is a collection of ideas based on my experiences, those of my clients over the years, and from all my conversations with mentors and friends. You can read straight through if you like, or skip around to the sections you think will be helpful.

You'll find a lot of things here that will work spectacularly well for you.

Other things won't do jack shit.

The only thing I ask of you is this: try some of the things I recommend even if they seem too simple, too hard, or too ridiculous. You may find you "know" a few things I cover in this book. But chances are you're not doing much with that knowledge. I want to help fix that.

You get out what you put in. So don't slack.

This is me unfiltered. This is advice I give to close friends. This is stuff I do that works for me and thousands of guys just like you that I've helped over the years.

I'm positive at least some of it will work for you, too.

Thanks for being here.

-Nate

A Note About The Hero Workout

This book is, for lack of a better word, my *manifesto*.

But there's more to it than the pages you read here.

I developed a 16-week progressive workout program and habit-based nutrition guide to help you build a strong, muscular, healthy body, and complement what you'll learn here.

If you're interested in checking that out, it's sold on my site for about the price of a chicken dinner and a bottle of mediocre wine.

[The Hero Workout](#)

Okay. On with the Hero Handbook.

Table of Contents

About the “What to Do Now Sections”	10
Introduction	11
The Hero Heart	18
You Are Going to Die.....	19
Memento Mori – Keep Track of Your Life.....	20
Join the Living.....	23
Avoid the Living-Impaired.....	24
No One Is Coming to Rescue You.....	25
Don't Blindly Swallow the Supposed Tos.....	27
Don't Believe the “OKs”	29
Define Your Rules.....	30
What Do You Need to Live Well?.....	32
Outline Your Perfect Day.....	35
Focus on Behaviors Instead of Outcomes.....	37
What to Do Now.....	39

The Hero Mind.....	41
De-Stress for 20 Minutes Every Day.....	42
Get 7-9 Hours of Sleep.....	46
Practice Breathing Correctly.....	51
Get Rid of Your Stuff.....	52
Buy Once, Buy Right.....	54
Use Whiteboards.....	55
Take Control of Your Morning.....	57
Indulge Every Now and Then.....	60
Don't Always Have a Routine.....	62
Turn Off Your Cell Phone.....	63
Set a Kitchen Timer.....	64
Find Someone Who Has Already Done It.....	65
Don't Pretend Like You Know.....	67
Make Eye Contact.....	68
Don't Keep Score.....	69
Stand Tall and Command a Room.....	70
Don't Be an Idiot with Money.....	73
Establish Your “Power Position”.....	75
Get Out of Credit Card Debt — 3 Simple Steps.....	77
Use the Envelope System.....	79
Cut the Lifeline.....	81
Pay Yourself First.....	82
What to Do Now.....	85

The Hero Body.....	88
The Hero Body, Defined.....	89
A Hero Body Serves You.....	91
Avoid Information.....	94
You Need a Program.....	96
You Don't Need a Bunch of Supplements.....	97
Motivation Is Overrated.....	99
The 7 Habits of a Heroic Workout Program.....	101
What to Do Now.....	104
The Hero Diet.....	107
Eat Like a Hero.....	108
Screw Counting Calories.....	109
Eat Real Food.....	110
Eat Organic if You Can Afford It.....	111
Eat at Least Four Times Per Day.....	112
Two Fists of Protein.....	114
Have Little to No Processed Carbohydrates.....	115
Eat Vegetables with Every Meal.....	116
Drink a Gallon of Water Per Day.....	118
Clean Slate — Do the Next Positive Thing.....	119
Throw Away Things that Are Bad for You.....	121
Wake and Shake.....	122
Buy Made-for-You Lunches.....	123
The Only Kitchen Utensils You Need.....	124
What to Do Now.....	126

Conclusion: Pay It Forward..... 128
The Wrap-Up and a Favor from Nate..... 131
About the Author..... 136

About the “What to Do Now Sections”

Here's the truth: it doesn't matter what you know. It matters what you *do*.

Heroes make their own luck and pursue whatever it is they want to accomplish. They don't collect information just to forget about it or put it off for another day.

Heroes do something immediately to get the ball rolling.

I encourage you to do the same.

That's why at the end of every chapter of this handbook you'll see a “What to Do Now” section, which is inspired by my work with Precision Nutrition and our online coaching programs.

After you read each chapter, take some time to follow what's outlined in these sections before moving on.

It may seem like a small step, but it's the most important part of the entire handbook.

Introduction

"You're so lucky."

He took a sip of beer, sat back in his chair and sighed.

We were sitting at a bar in downtown Missoula, Montana and I'd just finished telling him about my month-long trip overseas. I told him how I met up with a few of my blog readers for great dinners, worked a couple hours per day (and sometimes per week) from my laptop in cafés, and basically just toured around and did whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted.

"I wish I could do stuff like that," he said.

I smiled and didn't reply. I'd already tried to help him a few times over the past couple of years. And still... here we were.

Our talk drifted back to the usual safe topics: jobs, family, girlfriends.

We joked as we finished our drinks and paid our tab. Outside, we shook hands and parted ways.

On my drive home, I thought about our conversation. Mostly, I thought about one particular sentence: "You're so lucky."

To me, luck is buying a scratch-off lottery ticket and winning ten bucks.

Spending every day doing what you're passionate about and living how you want? Not so much.

But I know why he thinks I'm lucky.

Like a lot of guys, he's still swallowing *Supposed Tos*: I'm supposed to go to college and get a good job; I'm supposed to get my weekends off; I'm supposed to...whatever.

I can't blame him for thinking that way. Hell, I used to think the same.

But then I was "lucky" enough to have a few things happen.

I didn't really give a shit about school, so I skipped college and started my own business. I didn't have any money, so I took out a bank loan to fly across the country to meet writers and fitness entrepreneurs I admired. I didn't know it was out of the ordinary, so I randomly emailed magazine editors and told them I wanted their jobs.

Never mind I'd never been published or didn't have a college degree; I just knew I wanted to write and help people. I felt like I had something to say.

Now here's the interesting thing: the more I planned what I wanted my life to be like – and the more I executed that plan – the luckier I became.

I got a job at a local gym and learned how to train people to get in better shape. That transitioned to opening my own studio where I worked with regular guys and girls and the occasional professional athlete or celebrity.

I started writing on my blog, then for magazines, and then sold my first book to Penguin publishing.

Fast-forward to today: I make enough money to live comfortably, I have great mentors, good relationships with my family and friends, and I've made a career out of something I'm passionate about.

Thousands of people visit my blog every day to hear what I have to say.

In other words, life is good.

Over the past few years, I've met dozens of other people who are living the life of their dreams.

They're people who had an idea of what they wanted (or at least an idea of what they *didn't* want), and then set out to get it.

They aren't millionaires or trust-fund babies. They're just regular people with an uncommon way of looking at life.

Sure, most own small businesses. They make custom watchstraps, run finance blogs, build websites, teach people about sex, create life-changing workout programs,

run successful small clothing companies, write bestselling books, and more.

Others work as employees for awesome companies. They manage gyms, oversee advertising and marketing, write columns for magazines and newspapers, and work in restaurants.

But it's not just what they do to earn money that sets them apart. It's how they *live*.

They get up when they decide to get up. They spend their days doing whatever they like. They make enough money to do the things they want. They help people. They have meaningful relationships. They have ambitious goals, but are happy with what they already have.

They're in control of their lives.

They're **heroes**.

Although it's tough to see them when looking into a crowd, there are a lot more heroes than people think. All you have to do is notice how they stand out.

A hero:

- Lives by a set of rules he's spent time thinking about.
- Builds his body — his greatest asset — to look good and withstand sickness and physical obstacles.
- Seeks fun *and* fulfillment. (Even better if it's at the same time.)

- Spends time doing things he *wants* to do.
- Kicks ass when it's time to work.
- Commands a room with his confidence.
- Knows what he needs.
- Knows how to make money, keep it, and use it to fix problems and have fun.
- Fosters real relationships with people that are important to him.
- Has a plan to make his life — and the lives of others — better than most people dream about.

A coward:

- Doesn't know why he does what he does.
- Treats his body like a shitty vehicle instead of something he's proud of.
- Seeks fun at all costs, even if it's at the expense of other people (or himself).
- Wastes time doing what other people expect him to do.
- Puts off work, procrastinates on Facebook, or makes excuses about how “he's tired.”
- Commands negative attention with his machismo.
- Has no idea what he needs but *wants* everything.
- Gets in debt, spends money frivolously, and calls Mom and Dad for extra cash.

- Has fake relationships with his buddies, girls, and is generally an asshole.
- Complains all the time.

Where Are All The Heroes?

It's like most of us are in a state developmental limbo between school and supposed responsibility. (If you aren't careful this "limbo" can go on until you die.)

We've never taken the time to define what our values are, and all the old credibility indicators — graduating college, settling into a career, getting married, raising a family — have disappeared.

What's left is a gap most of us fill with apathy, bad booze, boredom, and shitty jobs. Consider this:

- College is leaving us tens of thousands of dollars in debt and won't guarantee a job.
- Since 1970, the number of young adults moving back home has increased 50 percent. Nearly one in five twenty-somethings move back in with their parents at some point.

We don't know what we're working for. We don't know what to expect. We don't know what our lives should be like.

So we blame the economy, our parents, our shitty luck, or other people.

We should blame ourselves.

Don't have the body you want? Your fault.

Working a job you don't like? Your fault.

Shitty grades in school? Your fault.

Up to your eyeballs in debt? Your fault.

It's *all* your fault. But this is actually great news.

Because it's your fault, you can take responsibility for it. And if you take responsibility for it, you can change it.

Even if we have other parts of our lives figured out, most of us are likely neglecting other vital areas.

Have a great body? How's your financial situation?

Making a ton of money? How are your relationships with your friends?

Life of the party? Are you truly happy or are you just putting off the “real world”?

The goal, mind you, isn't to become complete. That's impossible.

The goal is to seek experience, fulfillment, and fun. The goal is to feel good about ourselves and the lives we lead.

So let's start there.

It's time to take control of your life and do what you want to do.

It's time to make your own luck.

It's time to *become your own hero*.



THE HERO HEART

You Are Going to Die

How's that for a cheery way to start?

But it's true. You are going to die.

So am I. So is Lady Gaga, Bill Clinton, LeBron James, and every one you've ever heard of or ever seen.

Everybody is going to die.

Most of us are already at least a quarter of the way through our lives. And if we're lucky, we've got another 50 - 75 years to live.

That scares most people.

It shouldn't.

It should be liberating. Knowing you're going to die someday give you a *deadline*. (Sorry, but that was amusing to me.) You can do whatever you want, and you can start right now. In fact, every day you *don't* do what you want is another day that's gone forever.

Disappeared. Never gonna happen again. *Finito*.

Remember: *You are going to die*.

Memento Mori – Keep Track of Your Life

My friend Craig Weller is an inspiring guy. A former member of Naval Special Warfare, he's told me stories about living for days without food, drinking dirty water, swimming frantically while hauling a boat behind him, and spending weeks on deserted islands catching and eating bats while waiting for other people to come and relieve him of his duties. (And he thinks this stuff is *fun*. So that gives you an idea of the kind of person he is.)

But the coolest thing Craig has ever told me is how he keeps track of his life with what he calls his "Memento Mori chart."

Memento Mori is Latin for "Remember your mortality."

Here's how Craig explained it to me:

"Since I was about eighteen years old I have been maintaining a tally on this piece of paper. It's 52 blocks wide and 80 blocks tall. On the top left corner is my birthdate, and on the bottom right is the same date, 80 years later. Every week I mark off a block."

I don't write anything or make any kind of notes. I just black it out. The only thing left is the memories I have of that week and reality of how it has affected my life. In the end, the only things any of us have are our actions and our memories.

Doing this keeps my life in perspective. Each time I fill in a block I briefly consider what I did with that week. Sometimes I do so with a feeling of satisfaction. I want mine to be a life well lived. Other times I look back and realize that I frittered away most of my time on things that didn't really further my life, didn't make for any remarkable experiences, and didn't really make me happy.

I don't think that it would be possible to maintain a list like this and work in a cubicle for twenty years. Or even twenty months. Imagine that: 80 blocks filled in with no memories other than a gray wall and the occasional lunch at Applebees.

In fact, most people probably wouldn't want to do something like this at all. It would be too uncomfortable. Self-awareness is a pain in the ass when there are so many entertaining reality shows on cable. And excuses are easy. You probably get used to the blinders after a while and eventually don't even know what you're missing.

This weekend I filled in the 25th row on my sheet. The last block in a row always leads me to do some self-assessing. Am I happy with what I've been doing with my life? Have I been wasting time? Why? Where could I be right now if I hadn't?

That's heavy stuff. And it's great practice.

[Click this link right now](#) to download your own Memento Mori sheet. Fill it out up to the past week.

Look at all the black space. Then look at the amount of white space left.

Keep your sheet somewhere you can access it easily.

Look at it every time you need a kick in the ass.

Join the Living

We're not dead yet, so we can't go feeling sorry for ourselves. We have a real opportunity to do fun things, help other people, and live a worthwhile life. We have a chance to build a legacy that will carry on after we die.

Are you going to squander that responsibility or waste time talking about all the shit you should have done?

Are you really going to stay pissed off over stupid arguments or minor daily inconveniences?

Are you really going to sit on the couch, eat Cheetos and watch porn all day?

Get your ass up and join the living.

Try to make something out of your short life unless you want to be forgotten forever.

Avoid the Living-Impaired

The living-impaired are just...there. They breathe but don't live. They're not happy. Often, they're cynical.

“You can't just do whatever you want.”

“You can't leave school to start your own thing.”

“That will never work.”

“That's a bad idea.”

The living-impaired are all around us. They come disguised as friends, concerned family members, co-workers, or authority figures.

Heroes leave the living-impaired alone. They try to leech their negative (they call it “realistic”) worldview onto us.

Treat them like lepers and keep your distance.

No One Is Coming to Rescue You

In 1972 a plane carrying 45 people, including a Uruguayan rugby team and their family and friends, crashed into the desolate, frigid, and unforgiving Andes mountains.

29 people survived the crash. A few days later, an avalanche took 8 more lives when it flooded their makeshift shelter.

Search parties from three countries looked for the missing plane, but the search was called off after eight days. The survivors, having found a small transistor radio on the plane, heard that the search had been cancelled.

Here's an excerpt from the book *Alive*, describing this moment:

"The others who had clustered around Roy, upon hearing the news, began to sob and pray, all except Parrado, who looked calmly up the mountains which rose to the west. Gustavo Nicolich came out of the plane and, seeing their faces, knew what they had heard...Nicolich climbed through the hole in the wall of suitcases and rugby

shirts, crouched at the mouth of the dim tunnel, and looked at the mournful faces which were turned towards him.

'Hey boys,' he shouted, 'there's some good news! We just heard on the radio. They've called off the search.'

Inside the crowded plane there was silence. As the hopelessness of their predicament enveloped them, they wept.

'Why the hell is that good news?' Paez shouted angrily at Nicolich.

'Because it means,' Nicolich said, 'that we're going to get out of here on our own.'"

72 days later, two of the passengers – Nando Parrado and Roberto Canessa – hiked through the Andes to civilization. The remaining 16 survivors were rescued thanks to their 10-day trek.

There's a valuable lesson here:

No one is coming to your rescue.

If you want something, you need to take care of yourself and get to work.

Don't Blindly Swallow the *Supposed Tos*

How many people do you know who are going to college because their parents would disapprove if they didn't? People who study shit like "business" and make spreadsheets?

Maybe they're happy spending Mom and Dad's money on a piece of paper that won't set them apart from the other 30 people applying for the job. Then again, maybe they're not.

Like a frat boy on his third keg-stand, many of us succumb to social pressure and swallow *Supposed Tos*.

You're Supposed To honor your parents. You're Supposed To go to college. You're Supposed To get a good job.

Guess what? You aren't *supposed to* do shit.

Who's making these rules, anyway? Seems to me as if we're each making them up as we go.

The next time you feel pressured to do something, take a second to see if it's something you're *Supposed To* do.

Do you really want to do it?

If not, don't.

Of course, there is a caveat: Not all *Supposed Tos* are bad.

There are a lot of things that we may not feel like doing, but are good for us: hanging out at Grandma's house for more than a couple of hours; paying your taxes; helping your friend move.

Those things help you grow and foster good relationships.

Supposed Tos only become bad when you blindly swallow them without giving much thought.

Don't Believe the “OKs”

Just as bad as swallowing Supposed Tos is Believing the OKs.

It's OK to live with your parents for five years after college. It's OK to work a job you don't like. It's OK to "take some time off" and vegetate. It's OK to buy everything on credit and pay interest. It's OK to get drunk three nights per week.

Believing the OKs is just another way to shirk personal responsibility.

And just like blindly swallowing Supposed Tos, believing the OKs will eventually make you feel powerless.

Define Your Rules

Do you have a list of rules? Any hero worth his salt should.

Everything else in the world can crumble or fall into utter fucking chaos, but your list shouldn't budge or fall apart.

Think of your rules as your moral compass. Your “code”, if you will.

Here are mine:

1. Take care of myself with good food, sleep, exercise.
2. Be honest with everyone (including myself) and don't bullshit.
3. Treat my family and friends with respect, and constantly connect with them.
4. If it's not fun, don't do it.
5. If it's not fun but doing it will help you grow, then do it.
6. Help people become their own hero through my blog, articles, and daily actions.

You'll quickly find that describing your values is harder than it seems. I mean, anyone can write "family", but what the hell does that even mean?

You can write what you like, but it's more powerful to be specific.

Instead of "family", maybe "Connecting with my family by understanding who they are, having deeper conversations, telling stories, sharing memories, and always displaying my love for them" would be more actionable.

Whichever values resonate with you and make you excited to live, make sure to write those.

And no matter what you do, keep coming back to your rules to see how your current way of living stacks up.

We all get off course at some point, but with a compass we always know where we're going.

What Do You Need to Live Well?

When I got my first big paycheck, I bought a new Audi A6.

It was freakin' sweet. V6 engine, all leather interior, real wood paneling, turbo, and a Bose sound system. When I got behind the wheel at night, the red glow of dashboard felt like being in a cockpit of a fighter jet.

But after a few months the novelty of having a new car had worn off. I realized all I needed was a reliable vehicle to get me around. And I definitely could have saved more than \$10,000 buying a nice, comfortable car.

I've never really been a car person. In fact, I barely know how to change my tires. Or my oil. Or my windshield wiper blades. Or just about everything that needs changing on a car. (I understand these are official grounds for losing my "man card." I turned it in at the counter of Jiffy Lube.)

Having an Audi was really nothing more than saying, "I can afford expensive shit!"

Not really a good reason to buy something.

Which brings us to the subject of *needs*.

What else do you need besides water, food, shelter, sex, and sex? (If it's important, you write it twice.)

Let's strip down your life to the essentials to find the things you need to live a healthy, comfortable, fun life.

Just like your list of rules, the more specific you get with your needs, the more powerful they'll be.

Anyone can write down "food." But what kind of food?

A hot dog is different than an apple.

Remember: this is *your* list. You don't need to get too crazy or too detailed unless you really want to.

So if a latte makes your day a whole freakin' lot better, write it down.

No one's judging you. (Especially me, who enjoys a nice beer pretty much every day, often around lunchtime.)

Here's an abbreviated version of mine, to get you going.

Boring Needs

Water

Food

Exercise

Shelter

Clothing

Nate's Needs (in no particular order)

Filtered water

Mostly organic and local food

Strength training, stretching and mobility, and fun shit

A clutter-free, clean apartment

Small collection of quality outfits that will last

Travel wherever I want whenever I want

The ability to occasionally indulge

Meaningful relationships with family and friends

Savings (and to be debt-free)

Outline Your Perfect Day

This is an exercise I got from my friend Jim Labadie and is very similar to the Dreamlining concept made popular by another friend of mine, Tim Ferriss.

Pull up a text document or grab a sheet of paper. It's time to have some fun.

In the greatest detail possible, I want you to write down what a perfect day in your life would consist of.

Yeah, you may feel a bit stupid writing this out, but who cares? No one but you has to see this.

Besides, if you don't have a target, how will you know when you've hit it?

Here are a few questions to get you going (pay attention to the details):

What time do you wake up?

Who are you with?

Where are you living?

What does your house look like?

What kind of music are you listening to?

What kind of clothes are you wearing?

What are you eating?

What are you doing today?

Are you working on something?

Are you preparing for a trip?

How much money are you making?

Where are you going for lunch?

Who are you meeting?

Planning your day on paper, step-by-step, is the best way I know to actually begin living that way. I do this at least once every year.

It's a very cool feeling to look back at your list and realize every day resembles it more and more as time passes.

Focus on Behaviors Instead of Outcomes

The world is pretty uncontrollable. Life happens.

You can't make your body lose 20 pounds on command any more than you can make sure your house is worth a certain amount of money when you try to sell it.

You can plan a pretty picnic, but you can't predict the weather. (Thank you *Outkast*.)

In other words, you *can't control the outcome*.

But you can control your behaviors.

Get it?

Instead of setting "outcome goals" focus on setting "behavior goals".

Outcome Goal: Build an Amazing Body

That's incredibly vague with no real action steps. Besides, we haven't even determined what an "amazing body" means to us. Perhaps it's gaining two inches on our chest

and shoulders. Maybe it's getting our body fat below ten percent. The more specific you make the outcome, the easier it will be to know when you've achieved it.

Behavior Goals:

1. Read a book about training and nutrition.
2. Go to the gym three days per week.
3. Drink a gallon of water per day.
4. Eat four unprocessed meals per day consisting mainly of protein, healthy fats, and vegetables.
5. Get eight hours of sleep.
6. Consume five or fewer alcoholic drinks per week

By making and keeping these small promises to ourselves, we build momentum and start the "snowball effect". We accomplish one small goal and keep moving forward as every subsequent goal becomes easier to accomplish.

Bottom line: define what your outcome goal really means to you, then break it down into actionable steps that you will follow consistently.

What to Do Now

Print and fill out your Memento Mori sheet.

Like it or not, we are all going to die. Most of us are already at least one-quarter through our lives. Are you satisfied?

Take 15 minutes to write down your “rules”.

Remember, everything else in the world can fall apart, but your list shouldn't budge. (It can, however, be refined over time.)

What things are important to you? What's the “code” that you want to live by? What guides your moment-to-moment actions? These are tough questions that require real thought.

Take 15 minutes and write down your list of needs.

These are things that make your life better. They can be as straight forward as “food, water, shelter,” but I suggest

trying to get more detailed than that. Ask yourself this: "If everything in the world was taken away from me, what would I still need to not only survive, but to *thrive*?"

You're taking everything away and building up from the bottom — what do you need?

Take 15 minutes to outline your perfect day.

What does your perfect day look like? For most people, it's a combination of fun, work, family, and adventure. But you can write whatever you like.

Make it realistic and get detailed. No jetpacks.

Where are you living? Who are you living with? What time do you wake up? What does your house look like? What are you doing today?

As tempting as it is to write down "I want to live on a beach and lounge around all day", you need to think, "Is this what I really want to do? Won't I be bored out of my mind?"

If not, more power to you.

But I have a feeling you want more out of your life than vegetating.

I know I do.

THE HERO MIND

De-Stress for 20 Minutes Every Day

You're at the local zoo, checking out the Bengal tigers. It's feeding time, so you're behind the closed gate watching the tigers tear into raw meat, marveling over how easily their huge teeth and claws tear right through the flesh.

While watching, you notice you're hungry. But as you turn to walk to the hot dog stand you hear a shrill scream.

Your eyes dart back to the cage and you see...nothing.

And that's a problem.

The cage is completely empty.

Your heart rate increases and your adrenaline surges. You start breathing hard and your body begins twitching. Suddenly you see a tiger emerge from the now open gate.

Your body is in full-blown get-me-the-hell-out-of-here mode. But can you outrun a tiger?

The huge Bengal creeps toward you and snarls.

Do you still feel hungry?

This is the fight-or-flight response.

Your mind sensed imminent danger and sent signals to your body to speed your heart rate, push blood to your extremities (so you could run faster), increase your adrenaline, and shut off the other feelings you had (hunger) to allow for more important feelings (wanting to live).

But what you probably didn't know was this was a direct response from the **sympathetic nervous system**. Its job is to mobilize your body's resources under stress. It's the "don't get mauled by a tiger" nervous system — it helps your body handle stressful situations.

But this fight or flight response doesn't only come into play when there's an angry feline staring you down; it also reacts to everyday stressful situations like arguing with your spouse or boss, asking a beautiful girl out for the first time, and even lifting weights.

Most of us walk around all day with our fight or flight system in overdrive.

The sympathetic nervous system counteracts and suppresses the **parasympathetic nervous system**, which isn't good.

The parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for regulation of your internal organs and glands. It's also responsible for activities that occur when your body is resting, like salivation and digestion.

If the sympathetic nervous system is "fight or flight", the parasympathetic nervous system is "rest and digest."

The two nervous systems should work in a complementary way. You can think of the sympathetic nervous system as the accelerator, and the parasympathetic nervous system as the brake.

But most of us have our foot firmly pressed to the gas pedal and are overloading our sympathetic (fight or flight) nervous system.

Over time, being stuck in fight or flight mode (regardless of our awareness of it) results in suppression of the immune system. We'll be more susceptible to infection and sickness and won't be able to properly digest our food.

But the biggest effect of having an overactive sympathetic nervous system is the inability to fully relax and recover.

Simply put, your parasympathetic nervous system needs to "catch up" and be able to do its job (digest food, help you fall asleep, build muscle, etc.) and your sympathetic nervous system needs to take a chill pill.

You can do this by lowering the amount of stress in your life with de-stressing activities.

Set aside some time every day (like, really schedule it) to do one of the following for at least 20 minutes:

- Read fiction.
- Take a hot shower or bath.
- Take a 20-minute nap.

- Sit in a chair and do nothing but focus on your breath. (You won't believe how hard this is until you try it.)
- Make a hot cup of tea and do nothing but enjoy it.

Yeah, you may feel a bit weird doing some of this stuff, but your body is in overdrive and needs to calm down.

Take 20 minutes to help it recover.

Get 7-9 Hours of Sleep (Develop the Ultimate Sleep Ritual)

Most of us walk through life like we've been bitten by zombies but are only halfway through the transformation.

While I can't prove it, lack of sleep is probably to blame for the small bouts of depression and general apathy most of us feel every now and then.

When we don't sleep well throughout the night, we don't fire on all cylinders the next day, and a lot of experiences and would-be memories are lost in translation. We drag ourselves through the day instead of actually enjoying it.

When we sleep, we restore our bodies. Sleep is a very anabolic state, stimulating growth and rejuvenation of the immune, nervous, skeletal and muscular systems. (That means when you sleep, you get smarter and jacked. Or something like that.)

So what happens if you don't get enough sleep?

Not a lot if you just miss a few hours.

You'll probably be more irritable and have a hard time remembering things or concentrating, and your sex drive will be lower.

These things won't kill you, but they do make your day a little less awesome.

But if you go without sleep for, say, 24 hours? That's when things get interesting. Some research suggests that sleep deprivation for that long can reduce white blood cell count by up to 20%.

(The research was done on rats, but still. It's not a stretch to say humans would probably react much the same way.)

Here's an interesting tidbit from Wikipedia:

In a study conducted by Turner, Drummond, Salamat, and Brown, working memory was shown to be affected by sleep deprivation. Working memory is important because it keeps information active for further processing and supports higher-level cognitive functions such as decision making, reasoning, and episodic memory.

Sleep deprivation makes you slower, dumber, and more prone to illness. Not a good combination.

There is no glory in running on little sleep. Many people claim to be “just fine” on five hours per night, but these tough guys are short-changing themselves. I mean, you can survive on a diet of Twinkies and Mountain Dew if you like. But you certainly won't thrive.

That's why heroes develop a sleep ritual.

Step 1: Limit your caffeine to the morning with no caffeinated drinks after 4PM.

Caffeine is a stimulant that stays in your body for up to six hours after ingesting it. So if you're fairly sensitive to coffee, energy drinks, or crack cocaine, decrease your caffeine intake or at least cut it off in the afternoon.

Step 2: Two hours before bed, take out a piece of paper and do a "brain dump."

If it's ever taken you an hour or more to get to sleep, you've experienced the "mind jumble" that makes it nearly impossible to drift off.

Whether we're planning our next day, ruminating over shit that happened earlier, or just thinking about nothing in particular, it's easy to get lost in our heads as we lie down in bed.

A brain dump is exactly what it sounds like: dumping your thoughts onto paper. Pull out a piece of paper, and write down all the things you need to do tomorrow.

Then forget about it. The paper will still be there in the morning ready for your full attention.

Step 3: One hour before bed, turn off your TV and computer.

Don't drift off to sleep while watching David Letterman or YouTube videos. While it may seem like a relaxing activity, watching TV and playing on the computer are actually stimulatory experiences -- they're engaging your brain and emotions even if you don't consciously realize it. (And the light bouncing off the walls of your bedroom doesn't help.)

Step 4: Make some tea, listen to soft music, and read.

Reading fiction while sipping on hot herbal tea gets you out of your mind and into a story. It regulates your breathing and signals to your body that you're "shutting down" for the evening, all of which are conducive to quality sleep.

Step 5: Turn off your cell phone and other gadgets and put them in another room.

A very smart man by the name of Dr. Mercola suggests that eliminating radio frequency (RF) sources — like the ones

found in cell phones — enable your body to "shut down" more efficiently. According to him, RF signals interfere with your body's immune systems and have a negative impact on sleep quality and general health.

So your best bet is to leave your cell phone and charging stations in another room. If you use your cell as an alarm clock, you may want to consider buying a battery-operated clock instead. Besides, you don't want to hear text message pings while you're trying to sleep. They're much too tempting to check.

Practice Breathing Correctly

Most guys don't know how to breathe. I mean, yeah, they know how to suck air in their lungs and blow it out their mouths. But they don't know how to breathe correctly, using the full capacity of their lungs.

Here's a quick test to see how you do: take a deep breath. Did your chest rise? If it did, you need a quick tutorial in breathing.

Get on the floor and lie on your back with your knees bent. Close your eyes and place your hand on your stomach. Take a deep breath in through your nose, but instead of letting your chest rise, think about pushing your stomach out against your hand (a "belly breath", if you will).

This ensures you're using more of your lungs (which is widely considered to be a better way to ingest oxygen). Hold that breath for three seconds then gently exhale through your mouth. Repeat.

When you stand up, try breathing through your belly. It takes a while to get used to, but it's worth the practice.

Get Rid of Your Stuff

“One does not accumulate but eliminate. It is not daily increase but daily decrease. The height of cultivation always runs to simplicity.” - Bruce Lee

Just like you can accumulate too much information and be stuck with analysis paralysis — doing nothing because you have too much information — you can accumulate too much shit that occupies valuable physical (and mental) space.

Every few months, go through your house and de-clutter.

Kitchen – Do you really need that many forks, plates, and glasses? How often do you have people over? How often do you cook?

Living room – Does all your furniture have a purpose? Like, do you actually use it? Do you have a bunch of magazines or weird knick-knacks lying around? Trash them or give them away.

Bedroom – How many t-shirts do you really wear? Why does any person need more than two or three pairs of jeans? For that matter, why do you even have a dresser?

Hang your pants, button-down shirts, and polos, and fold your t-shirts and stick them on a shelf in your closet.

Getting rid of stuff you rarely use is liberating. Pick a day this week and go through your house to see how much extra crap you can eliminate from your life.

Buy Once, Buy Right

It's better to buy an expensive item that will last than a cheap item that won't make it more than a year.

There's a reason some coats cost \$400. There's a reason some knives cost \$100.

They last a lot longer than their cheaper alternatives.

Buy once, buy right, and you'll save money in the long term.

Get used to spending money on things you actually need. You want them to last.

Use Whiteboards

What do you want to accomplish this year? How about this week? What about *today*?

Goals are good, but they don't mean shit if we don't write them down and actually set up habits to achieve them.

Go to the store and get three Whiteboards: 1 large, 1 medium, and 1 small.

Write your “big” goals on the large board, your weekly habits and “things to do” on the medium board, and your daily habits on your small board.

Here's a peek into each of my three boards:

Big Board

- Take a one-week trip by myself
- Don't look like an idiot while dancing with my Richelle (my girlfriend)
- Pass the Precision Nutrition certification test

Medium Board

- Make a list and research 5 places I want to see
- Research the cost of private dance lessons
- Pick one chapter per week from the PN textbook read

Small Board

- Pick a date to leave on my trip and book the flight
- Actually go to the private lesson and practice
- Read the chapter and take notes
- See the big picture. Write out a weekly goal. Set daily habits and do them.

Take Control of Your Morning

How you spend your morning is indicative of how the rest of your day will be.

Do you really want to start your day by hitting the snooze button, sleeping in, eating a shitty breakfast, and hurrying to work?

What are you gonna do next, bitch and complain about how you don't have enough time to do anything?

Take control of your morning and make yourself have good day. This is called being proactive instead of reactive.

Step 1: When the alarm goes off, get up.

Get out of the habit of lounging around for 10 more minutes or re-setting your alarm. Just because you can get up whenever you like doesn't mean you should delay starting your day.

Step 2: Drink a huge glass of water.

You're probably dehydrated anyway. Drinking a glass of water will also speed up your metabolism.

Step 3: Go for a 5-10 minute walk outside.

Walk around your neighborhood or apartment complex. Take deep breaths. Get loose. Listen to what's going on around you.

Step 4: Eat breakfast.

Scramble some eggs, make some oatmeal, or just throw a bunch of stuff in a blender and drink it down. You've been fasting for 7+ hours and need food.

Step 5: Look at the daily habits on your small whiteboard.

What are you doing today? Pick the most important task and do that first without interruption.

What's the result of following these five steps?

You get up on time and don't procrastinate. You hydrate, breathe fresh air, loosen up your stiff body, feed

yourself, and accomplish something important early in the day.

Fuck Folgers. The best part of waking up is actually doing something with your morning.

Indulge Every Now and Then

I love having a glass of beer with lunch, and sometimes you can find me hanging with a few close friends enjoying a Cuban cigar and a glass of way-too-expensive bourbon.

Tobacco? Alcohol? What's next, hard drugs and hookers?

I don't view these things as "bad" (except for maybe the drugs and hookers) and I certainly don't judge my friends for indulging in them every now and then.

But there are three key words here: "now and then."

I don't typically advocate that people put potentially harmful things in their bodies, but I don't judge them as long as it happens relatively infrequently.

So a chain-smoker gets a look of disdain while a couple-times-a-year cigar smoker gets a nod of approval. Is it fair? Probably not. But these are my rules. (I'm sure you have yours.)

So why did I want to include this section in the Handbook?

First, I don't want to lie. Fitness professionals, writers, and plain ol' human beings aren't infallible. Most just make it look like they are.

Secondly, I just don't think you can look at everything with a “do this, don't do that” mentality. There's always a grey area.

Is it better to never smoke a cigar or drink alcohol? Most definitely.

But do I enjoy it? Abso-goddamn-lutely.

Fitness and living a healthy lifestyle isn't just about abstaining from certain things. It's about living the life you want, taking full responsibility for it, and having fun by seeking out new experiences.

So the next time I'm in your town, let's grab a drink.

Don't Always Have a Routine

Don't always follow your morning routine, or any routine for that matter. Take a day (or a week) to do whatever the hell you want.

Sleep in late and go out for breakfast. Order pancakes. Take a road-trip to a spot a few hours away from town and go do something.

Routines are essential for establishing some sort of order in your life and getting things done.

But you shouldn't be a slave to them.

Turn Off Your Cell Phone

Are you one of those people who brings their cell phone to dinner and texts at the table? Or answers a phone call when you're in the middle of a conversation?

Stop it.

Turn that fucker off and pay attention to what you're doing at that moment. Focus. This moment is never going to happen again; perhaps you should appreciate it and show some respect to the people you're with.

Another thing: don't become a slave to your gadgets. Heading to the gym? Swinging by your girlfriend's place? Going out to lunch with friends? Leave your phone in the car, or at least silence it.

Unless you're the President, you're not so important that you need to be reachable every minute of every day.

Set a Kitchen Timer

Working on something important? Set a kitchen timer and race the clock. Most people put off work because they overestimate how difficult it will be or how much time it will take.

You have to kick-start action and hold yourself accountable.

I'm writing this with 47 seconds left on my timer.

Once it rings, I'll stop and take a small break. Then I'll re-set it and start right back up.

Things get done when you actually *do* them. Stop putting off important work or waiting for inspiration to hit.

There. Break time.

Find Someone Who Has Already Done It

Want to become a millionaire? Hang out with millionaires.

Want to be in great shape? Hang out with other people who are in great shape.

The reason is two-fold:

First, humans have a hard time predicting the future. We have an idea of what we want to do and what it may feel like to do it, but we don't *really* know because we've never experienced it before.

Someone who's already experienced it will have a more trustworthy opinion than our own.

As Harvard professor Daniel Gilbert explains:

...people imagine the future poorly, in particular what will make them happy.

This is because:

- *Imagination tends to add and remove details, but people do not realize that key details may be*

fabricated or missing from the imagined scenario.

- *Imagined futures (and pasts) are more like the present than they actually will be (or were).*
- *Imagination fails to realize that things will feel differently once they actually happen -- most notably, the psychological immune system will make bad things feel not so bad as they are imagined to feel.*

Heady stuff, for sure.

Secondly, if you're hanging out with people who are doing what you want to do, you'll start to adopt their habits.

You'll accomplish your goal quicker because you'll be in an environment that fosters it.

If you want to do something, find someone who's done it before you, buy them lunch, and talk with them.

Don't Pretend Like You Know

People don't like to ask questions because they don't want to seem stupid. They want to act like they have all the information. But that's impossible.

Have you ever been in a conversation where you were explaining something unique, and the other person nodded their head and said something like, “Yeah, I get it.”

Guess what? They didn't get it. None of us understand *everything*.

When you catch yourself doing this in conversation, stop the person and ask what they mean.

“What's that?”

“How does that work?”

“What do you mean?”

“Can you tell me more?”

You'll have better conversations and you may learn a thing or two.

Make Eye Contact

It's easy to do while listening, but hard to do while talking.

Look at the person you're talking with and pick one eye. Focus on it while you talk. Make sure to blink every once in a while so you don't look crazy.

Eye contact displays interest and confidence.

Don't Keep Score

We all have that friend who remembers exactly how much money you owe them. Even if it's an inconsequential amount – say, five bucks – they'll hang it over your head.

“Dude, you still owe me five bucks.”

“Hey man, do you mind grabbing lunch for me? You owe me money, remember?”

Don't be that person. Don't keep score.

Buy someone lunch because you *want* to buy them lunch. If a friend asks to borrow twenty bucks, give it to them if you can spare it. But don't remind them of it every day after. Is it really worth putting a strain on your friendship for twenty dollars?

Besides, if they're a good friend, they'll make a mental note and help you the next time you need it.

And if they don't? Oh well. Your twenty bucks is gone. They probably needed it more than you, anyway.

Or you can always get new friends.

Stand Tall and Command a Room

The way you stand, sit, or walk makes a big impact on how you feel and how others perceive you.

For instance, a 2010 study randomly assigned 42 participants to assume and hold a pair of either low- or high-power poses.

The high-power posers spent one minute sitting in a chair in front of a desk, with their feet resting on it and hands clasped behind the head. In the other pose, they stood, leaning forward over a table, with their arms out and hands resting on the table.

The low-power group sat for one minute with their hands clasped on their thighs, legs together, and also stood for one minute with their arms folded and legs crossed.

After the subjects had finished their poses, they were given \$2 with the option of keeping it or gambling it on the roll of a die. Depending on the outcome, the subjects could double their money or lose it.

Subjects also were asked to rate how "powerful" and "in charge" they felt. The researchers measured hormone levels before and after the poses.

Those who held the high-power poses saw their testosterone increase, while their levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, decreased.

The high-power posers were also more likely to risk their \$2 for the chance to double it. Eighty-six percent took the gamble, compared with 60 percent of the low-power posers. They also reported feeling more powerful and in charge than the low-power posers.

Now if that's not a good reason to stand up straight, I don't know what is.

6 Steps To Testosterone-Producing Standing Posture

Step 1: Stand with your back against a wall with your shoulders, butt, and heels touching.

Step 2: Place your left hand behind the small of your back and the wall. If you can easily slide your fist back there, squeeze your abs and try to bring your lower back closer to the wall.

Step 3: Drop your head until your chin is on your chest.

Step 4: Shrug your shoulders high, then roll them back and drop them down. Think about squeezing a tennis ball between your shoulder blades.

Step 5: Bring your head back up to touch the wall and keep your eyes level in front of you.

Step 6: Relax, but maintain your head-straight, shoulders-back posture. Step away from the wall.

Don't Be an Idiot with Money

No one likes to feel completely powerless, but if the statistics are true, it certainly seems like a lot of us are.

The average credit card debt is just over \$15,000 per household (thousands more if you have student loans) and almost no one has savings.

Most of us live paycheck to paycheck and would be completely screwed if anything tragic happened.

(Shit, we'd be completely screwed if our car broke down and we just need a few hundred bucks to fix it.)

I know, I know. Some debt is virtually unavoidable. Student loans, for instance. If you want to go to college and don't have money saved, a loan makes sense. (Let me rephrase: it makes sense if you actually study, do well in school, then use your degree to do something worthwhile and pay back the money you owe.)

What I'm talking about is stupid debt.

Using your credit card for things you don't need then not paying it off every month? Stupid debt.

Wasting away in college while racking up a ton of debt? Stupid.

Signing up for a "Target card" or any kind of specialty card just for the sake of getting a discount? *Very* stupid.

I'm all for spending money on the things you want. I spend more than \$1,000 per month on food and drinks because I like to eat well, go out for meals, and treat my friends.

But here's the thing: *I only spend the money I have.*

If you buy something with a credit card, make sure you have the money in your bank account to pay that sucker off.

No one should be paying 20 percent interest on a steak dinner.

Establish Your “Power Position”

When you owe money and don't have any savings to handle emergencies or cover things you want to do (like travel), you're essentially powerless.

A few years ago, after realizing I was giving up way too much power by being in debt, I came up with the “power position.”

These are rules I have in place to make sure I always have some form of control.

Nate's Power Position:

- No credit card debt (pay credit cards in full every month).
- \$1,000 in “emergency” savings
- \$10,000 in regular savings
- Contribute max amount of money to my Roth IRA (long-term savings)

I have other savings accounts for travel, toys, and gifts, but this is my bare minimum. What does it enable me to do? Well, most importantly, I never freak out.

Car breaks down? I have money to fix it. A sudden drop in monthly income? I've got some extra to help me through.

Things could go wrong and I'd be OK while I figured shit out.

What's your power position? What things do you need to have in place to gain more control?

Get Out of Credit Card Debt – 3 Simple Steps

While there are other methods out there, this is the strategy I used to get out of credit card debt. (About \$10,000 worth at one time.)

1. Stop spending money on stupid things you don't need.

Do you *really* need a new pair of pants? Do you *really* need to go out for dinner? Probably not.

Tighten up on some of your habits and think of alternatives – wearing the same pants or cooking dinner for starters. Before you buy anything ask yourself: “Do I really need this right now? Or do I just want it?”

If it's the latter, leave it on the shelf and save your money.

2. Pick one card at a time and pay that sucker off.

If your balance is spread over a few different cards, pick the one with the least amount on it, and pay that off first. In other words, pay off the \$500 balance before the one with \$3,000 on it.

This will help set up the "snowball effect" and get you excited about paying off the rest. As weird as it sounds, having a small victory like paying off a small balance will give you motivation and resolve to keep going.

Every month, pay the minimum on your other cards while putting as much money as you can on the one you chose. Once that's paid off, pick the next card with the lowest balance and repeat the process. If all your debt is on one card, throw everything you have at it.

3. Leave your cards at home.

As you're paying off your cards, make sure to leave them out of your wallet and out of your sight. They are *not* an option for anything. I put mine in a drawer and didn't look at them for months.

Use the Envelope System

Until you can learn to use your cards responsibly and pay them off every month, you're gonna use cash.

Grab a few envelopes and label each one for a different purpose.

“Grocery store”

“Eating out”

“Gas”

“Fun”

“Drugs”

(I'm kidding about the drugs one. Unless you actually use prescription medication. Or have a medical marijuana card. Or if drugs are *really* important to you. Then it's fine.)

At the beginning of every month, after you've paid your bills, contributed to your savings account, your retirement account, and your emergency account, divvy up your money into the separate envelopes.

That's what you're allowed to spend. Nothing more.

If on the 17th of the month you run out of “fun” money, you're either gonna have to get very creative or dip into one of the other envelopes. But once the money is gone, it's gone for good.

Paying with cash is more “painful” than paying with a credit card since you can actually see the money leaving your hand.

It's easy to grab a few more items or order another round of drinks when you're paying with a card. You likely won't even see anything until the end of the month when you check your statement. (That is, *if* you check your statement, another thing a lot of people don't do.)

Get in the habit of using cash for most of your purchases and save the cards for buying airline tickets and other “big” items.

Then pay it off.

Cut the Lifeline

We all want to be self-sufficient, but as soon as things get tough, it's always easy to call mommy and daddy.

Don't do it.

Instead, cut your lifelines.

Eat tuna fish, beans, and oats for every meal. Grab a book from the library instead of buying it on Amazon. Stop driving so much if you can't afford the gas.

Whatever you do, *do not ask for money*.

It's time to put on your big boy pants.

A lot of people use their parents or friends as their emergency savings. They're the easy choice that doesn't really require any thinking, just an awkward phone call.

But when you cut your lifelines, you'll have no choice but to figure it out on your own.

When you don't have any other options, you suddenly become a lot more responsible.

Pay Yourself First

If you've ever read a personal finance book you've probably heard the advice “pay yourself first” repeated like a metronome.

If you haven't, here's what it means:

Before you pay a bill, a friend, or put money in your envelopes, take some amount of money — the larger, the better — and put it away for yourself.

If you can only afford to give yourself \$25 bucks, then do it. It's better than nothing.

Where does the money go?

Ideally it gets spread across a few accounts that will help increase your power position and give you some money to do whatever the hell you want to with it.

In an “emergency” account

Keep at least \$1,000 in an online savings account to help pay for random things that come up like car repair or a doctor's visit.

In a long-term savings account

This isn't a retirement account but should be seen as a "cushion". The typical recommendation is to have at least 3 months of living expenses saved, which I think is a good idea.

Still, I'd rather have six months' worth saved.

If you decide to leave your job (or you get fired) this is your lifeline while you sort things out.

In goal-focused savings accounts

Set up a an online savings account at <http://ingdirect.com> for "travel" and "toys", or whatever's important to you. Having an online bank account like this makes it easier to save, simply because it's a pain in the ass to get your money out. (It often takes three days or more to transfer to your local bank account.)

I have automatic withdrawals set up so I don't ever see the money go. Think of it as a "reverse raise."

In a Roth IRA or other investment vehicle.

If you have a 401K, then put as much as you can into it. Often, if you're in the corporate world, your employer will match your contribution.

Since I work for myself, I opened up a Roth IRA through <http://www.troweprice.com>

With a Roth, all earnings are tax-free when you withdraw them. The catch? You have to wait until you're 60 to get all the money back out. (You can withdraw the principal, but you'd be better off leaving it alone.)

But that's OK. You don't need the money anyway. You have other savings accounts for emergencies, travel, and toys. Right?

What to Do Now

Pick one de-stressing activity and follow it every day for the next week.

We need to strike a balance between our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. It's time to apply the break and slow down so our bodies can “rest and digest.”

Pick one de-stressing activity from below and follow it every day for the next week. Schedule it into your day and don't skip it. (It helps if you do it at the same time every day.)

- Read fiction.
- Take a hot shower or bath.
- Take a 20-minute nap.
- Sit in a chair and focus only on your breath.

Follow the “sleep schedule” tonight (or tomorrow if you're reading this in the evening).

We all know how important quality sleep is, but most of us don't get nearly enough. Follow these five steps tonight:

Step 1: Limit your caffeine to the morning with no caffeinated drinks after 4PM.

Step 2: Two hours before bed, take out a piece of paper and do a "brain dump."

Step 3: One hour before bed, turn off your TV and computer.

Step 4: Make yourself some tea, listen to soft music, and read something light.

Step 5: Turn off your cell phone and other gadgets and put them in another room.

Follow the “morning routine” tomorrow morning.

After you've de-stressed and followed your sleep schedule, your body and mind will be ready to get things done. Take control of your morning by following these steps:

Step 1: When the alarm goes off, get up.

Step 2: Drink a huge glass of water.

Step 3: Go for a 5-10 minute walk outside.

Step 4: Make breakfast

Step 5: Look at the daily habits on your small whiteboard and choose one to do uninterrupted.

Pick one money-related goal and take the next positive step.

Have credit card debt? Need to start saving for retirement? Planning a trip anytime soon?

Pick something from the section on money and do it today. Here are some ideas:

- Set up an ING bank account and pay yourself first.
- Look at your credit card statements and see which card you can pay off first.
- Cut the lifelines from your parents or friends and make a vow to not ask anyone else for money.
- Set up the envelope system and start paying cash for everything.



THE HERO BODY

The Hero Body, Defined

The Hero Body is your body, only better.

It looks better, feels better, and performs better. It's stronger, leaner, and more muscular than you are now.

Lots of guys don't like hearing that. They want to build a body like the dude on the cover of Men's Fitness. They want a body like an NFL running back.

While we can look as good (or better) than both of those guys, training to get their body isn't the healthiest idea.

Every body is different. We have different muscle insertion points, limb lengths, and hormone profiles. When we get fat, we look different than other fat people. And when we get lean and muscular, we look different than other lean and muscular people.

There is no quintessential Hero Body. You can't point to a picture and say, "That's the Hero Body."

We're all working with what we have, and what we have is good enough.

Screw trying to look like anyone else.

So let's take whatever you're working with right now and make it better.

Let's get you leaner, more muscular, faster, stronger, more flexible, and impervious to injury.

Let's make your body something you're proud of.

Most importantly, let's make it something that serves *you*, and not the other way around.

A Hero Body Serves You

You know the meatheads or “fitness freaks” in the gym? The people who look like they spend all day there, enough to where they probably have a cot in the back room?

We're not gonna do that.

Most of these guys have low self-esteem, no social life, or no identity outside of the gym. They serve their body instead of their body serving them.

Heroes don't lift heavy things or run sprints or get painful deep-tissues massages just so they can look better (though it does help). They train their body because they want it to work well for a long time.

Guys who lift weights know what I'm talking about. Training, sweating, and moving your body just plain feels good. It releases endorphins, primes your muscles for growth, helps strengthen your bones, and gives you all those other benefits you're already aware of.

But unlike a lot of “fitness freaks”, Heroes don't base their lives around the gym.

We all know guys who obsess about how much weight they can lift.

Having a goal and being disciplined is fine.

Doing whatever you need to accomplish that goal is fine.

But not at the expense of the rest of your life. You need to be able to do other shit.

Need to eat five meals per day, perfectly balance out your macronutrients, and do exactly 5 sets of 5 on the bench press with 80% of your 1-rep max? Knock yourself out.

(Though unless you're a wannabe bodybuilder or competitive powerlifter, you probably don't need to do *any* of that.)

Me? I'll be in the gym for maybe an hour a day having fun and working hard. Then I'm getting the hell out of there.

Most people who adopt the "all or nothing" fitness mindset are the ones who burn out quickly.

They haven't yet realized that fitness and working out is something that enhances life.

They won't last long. And neither will their bodies.

Why Most Guys Have Shitty Bodies (Even If They “Work Out”)

- They don't move more than they have to
- They don't train with free weights

- They *only* train with free weights
- They don't follow a workout program
- They consume 5+ alcoholic drinks per week
- They don't work hard enough when they're training
- They sit down too much (in and out of the gym)
- They take stupid supplements
- They don't know what kind of food to eat
- They read too much about working out
- They only train their favorite muscles
- They're incredibly weak on most every exercise
- They have terrible exercise form
- They eat way too little (I'm looking at you, Skinny Guy)
- They eat way too much (I'm looking at you, Tubby)
- They spend too much time on Internet forums talking about working out
- They don't have a set schedule of when they go to the gym
- They don't try new ways of working out

Avoid Information

You can only take in so much information before you get overloaded and decide to do nothing. Collecting information is mental masturbation. You have the illusion that you're building knowledge, but you're not doing a damn thing to show you actually have that knowledge.

I can't tell you how many times I've gone to fitness seminars and met guys that I only knew online. Their bodies are average at best. Yet they're on the forums talking about advanced workout and nutrition methods.

Most of the training methods people write about are just regurgitated shit that has been said a hundred times already.

Most chapters in fitness books rehash old things and package them up as something new.

Everyone's talking about the same shit and dressing it up as the “best method.”

There is no best method.

Here's a fact: I'm not telling you anything new about training in this book.

I'm not revolutionizing a damned thing.

What I'm doing is trying to give you a plan so you can cut out all the stuff you don't need.

There aren't any details to stress over. There shouldn't be a question in your mind about what you should do.

You shouldn't worry about testing your 3 rep-max if you don't go to the gym four days per week.

You shouldn't do wave-loading, or high-threshold hypertrophy, or any kind of fancy set and rep scheme or loading method if your form sucks balls.

You certainly shouldn't get upset about what Strength Coach A said about Strength Coach B.

Why argue training methods and “the best way to work out” when you're not even working hard?

You Need a Program

Most guys can't go into the gym and wing it. Believe me, I've tried.

All it leads to is 20 minutes of trying to figure out what the hell you're going to do and decreased motivation.

And you'll probably have a terrible workout.

You Don't Need a Bunch of Supplements

A supplement, as I said in my first book *Built for Show*, is something that you add to an already existing protocol. It doesn't replace the entire protocol.

I used to work for T-Nation.com which is owned by Biotest.

Biotest, if you don't know, is arguably one of the best sports nutrition companies in the world and makes a couple dozen products to help people gain muscle, lose fat, and perform better.

But here's the thing: you don't need any of that stuff. Does some of it help? Sure. Do you need it? Nope.

Most people don't know, but when I gained 40 pounds of muscle, I was only using a basic protein powder and a workout drink.

I bought them on my own and I used them on workout days. They helped me gain muscle, but they weren't *the reason* I gained muscle.

They maybe accounted for 5 percent of my overall success.

I know guys who give up their whole paycheck to buy supplements. And marketing has us believing we actually need all of it.

When I worked for Biotest, I used to get a gigantic box of whatever the hell I wanted for free. I experimented with different powders and pills (all legal) and saw some decent progress.

But nothing like it was when my body was primed to grow a few years ago.

The bottom line: supplements can help, but they're not necessary. Far from it, really.

Still, I know you probably want to know what I take, so here's my supplement list:

- Protein Powder (Low-Carb Metabolic Drive or AtLarge Nitrean)
- Surge Recovery Workout Drink
- Creatine Monohydrate
- Fish Oil
- Greens Supplement (Greens Plus or Superfood)
- ZMA

That's it. And I often forget to take half of it.

Motivation Is Overrated

Most people with above average bodies are motivated to work out only about half the time. Probably less.

Just like a writer can't stare at a computer and wait for motivation to hit, you can't lie in bed and wait for motivation to train. It's not gonna happen.

The only way to get and stay in great shape is to be consistent, no matter how you're feeling.

If you're following a four-day workout program and on Day 3 you don't feel like going, that's the day where you need to get in the gym most.

Skip the gym once and you'll lose a little of your power and it'll be much easier to skip it the rest of the week.

You don't want that to happen.

Here are a couple of tricks I've used when I'm not motivated and the gym sounds less fun than watching an Ashton Kutcher movie:

Lay your workout clothes by your bed.

Since I train in the morning, the first thing I do when I wake up is put on some comfortable clothes and drink a big glass of water. If I have my workout clothes on, it means I'm already one step closer to going to the gym.

Tell yourself that you're just going to go stretch.

Stretching is a small commitment and one you can talk yourself into doing. Once you get to the gym and go through your warm-up and stretches, you're usually ready to lift anyway.

Go to a different gym.

Sometimes you just need a change of pace. Whenever you're feeling particularly unmotivated, go to a different gym for a change of scenery and equipment.

Now if all of this sounds stupid, you're not alone. I think it's stupid, too.

But if it gets your ass in gear, it's worth it.

The 7 Habits of a Heroic Workout Program

1. Train 3-4 times per week.

This is enough time to hit all your major muscle groups and provide enough of a stimulus for your muscles to grow.

2. Use mostly compound exercises with free weights.

The more muscles we work, the better. In my experience using free weights and doing bodyweight exercises are superior to machine exercises for building muscle, keeping joints healthy, and burning calories.

3. Work hard, rest less.

Only 1 out of 10 people I see in the gym are actually working hard enough to accomplish anything. Most go through the motions. That's bullshit and will lead to

lackluster results. You're not going to the gym to hang out. You're there to work. Remember that.

Also, most guys take way too much time in between their sets. They walk around, get long drinks of water, and talk.

The less rest you take the better it will be for your physique (you'll increase the amount of calories you burn) and your life outside of the gym (you won't be tempted to stick around and stare at the wall).

4. Always perform a good warm-up.

You want to prime your body and nervous system for the work ahead and this is the perfect time to do that. Performing mobility and flexibility exercises before you train will also help keep you healthy and injury free.

5. Do stuff that sucks.

“Stuff that sucks” can be categorized as anything that's hard because 1) your body isn't used to it 2) it's just plain fucking hard. (See: *split squats, unilateral movements, energy systems work.*)

Doing stuff that sucks is a great way to burn calories (because your body normally has to work a lot harder to do them) and ensures you're taking care of muscle imbalances and building a symmetrical, injury-free body.

6. Use perfect form.

Whenever I see someone doing an exercise incorrectly I cringe. You only get one shot to do each rep right so you'd better make the most of it and not screw around. Using improper form leads to injury and decreased muscle activation. It also leads to dropping a bar on your head.

7. Practice progressive overload.

If you don't challenge your body, it has no reason to change for the better. That's why you should focus on doing a little more a little better with every session.

That could mean adding five more pounds to an exercise, knocking five seconds off your rest period, or just performing an exercise with better form and more fluidity.

What to Do Now

Run your current training program against the “7 Habits of a Heroic Workout Program” to see how it stacks up.

Does your current training program cover every habit? How's that working out for you so far? Are you getting the kind of results you want? Perhaps it's time to buckle down and get serious, huh?

Ask yourself some hard questions.

The more we ask ourselves hard or uncomfortable questions, the more progress we usually make. Why? Because uncomfortable questions make us think critically about what we hold to be true. And our answers to those questions can help us smash through the ceiling we unknowingly put above us. Here are some questions to get you going:

- Am I following a training program that was made for me?
- Am I actually being consistent and going to the gym every day I need to?
- Have I followed this training program for more than a few months? Or am I just jumping around from program to program?
- What do I really want my body to look like? Am I doing what it takes to get it there? Do I even *know* what it takes?
- Am I spending too much money on supplements when I should be focusing on eating enough high-quality food?
- How many freaking questions is Nate going to write here?

**Want a training routine
to help you build
the Hero Body?**

**Check out the
[Hero Workout.](#)**



**THE HERO
DIET**

Eat Like a Hero

You can train all you want, but if you're not eating the right amount of the right foods, you'll barely see any positive changes.

Nutrition is where most everyone screws up, usually because they make it too complicated. They count calories, follow weird diets, or have massive cheat days, even though they don't have the discipline to eat clean the rest of the week.

I believe eating for a goal like gaining muscle or losing fat is worthwhile and something that you'll need to be diligent about.

But once that's up, it's best to move on. You can't eat like that forever. In fact, you *shouldn't* eat like that forever.

But you can follow certain principles that will help you stay healthy and lean the rest of your life.

“Methods are many, principles are few. Methods always change, principles never do.”

Below, I cover what I call “everyday eating”, which are principles or strategies I use every day to eat healthy.

Screw Counting Calories

Who follows calorie counters anyway? Are there really people out there who are measuring their food and placing it individual containers?

These are probably the same people who weigh their feces and freak out at restaurants.

“I said dressing on the side!”

Counting calories — or at least knowing how many you need to gain muscle or lose fat — can be helpful sometimes. But once you're out of fat-burning or muscle-gaining mode and hit cruise control, you can forget all about it.

Eat Real Food

Humans have done well on high-protein, high-fat, high-carb, and many other “diet” variations. What they haven't done is thrive on “food” with barcodes, foods that come out of a box, or anything bought in a fast food drive-through.

Real food — stuff your great, great, great grandparents would recognize as food — is all you should be putting in your body if you want to look good and feel better.

What's real food?

- Lean meats like chicken, beef, and fish
- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Beans
- Nuts and seeds

It doesn't matter if you follow the Paleo diet, Atkins, the Zone, or whatever diet is being pushed right now. They all have their merit. The most important thing is to eat *real food*.

That's 90% of it right there.

Eat Organic if You Can Afford It

Despite what you may think, food doesn't just materialize in the aisles of your grocery store. It actually comes from somewhere. (Think about that the next time you eat a chicken nugget.)

Where it comes from, the soil it's grown in, and how it's raised and treated, are all very important. While there are studies for both sides of the organic vs. non-organic debate, I usually choose organic whenever possible, especially on foods like fruits, vegetables, and lean meats (usually called grass-fed or pasture-raised).

If you can't afford organic food, I understand. Just do the best you can.

I'm not sure if it's placebo effect, but I feel a lot better after shopping at an all-organic store.

Then again, just because something says it's organic doesn't mean it's healthy.

Hell, I see organic pizzas and frozen meals all the time.

Eat at Least Four Times Per Day

Every fitness professional or trainer has their own idea about how many times per day people should eat.

With my clients, I've found anything less than four times per day usually leads to sub-par results. Whether it's from their metabolism slowing down, not enough nutrients, or anything in between, I'm not sure.

All I know is that when you eat at least four meals per day, you have more energy, more opportunities to provide your body with nutrients, and a better chance of building and maintaining lean, muscular, healthy body.

Are there strategies for gaining muscle quickly? Sure. Are there strategies for losing fat fast? Uh-huh. People eat 7 times per day, fast for 24 hours, do protein pulsing, and a bunch of other methods that all make sense.

But I'm talking about “everyday” rules. The simpler you make it, the more consistent you'll be. And the more consistent you are, the better the results over the rest of your life.

If you're in it to eat healthy, build and maintain a good body, and have energy throughout the day, four or five meals is all you need.

Two Fists of Protein

Along with being the building blocks of muscle, protein is thermogenic, and actually helps you burn fat.

Most people don't take in nearly enough protein, which means their muscles aren't getting enough nutrients maintain their size, let alone grow.

Shoot for around 40 grams of protein per meal, whether it's from lean meats, protein powder, tofu, or other vegetarian options.

What's 40 grams look like? Make a fist with each hand and look at them. That's how much protein you need every meal.

Have Little to No Processed Carbohydrates

Processed carbohydrates like breads, cereals, pastas, cakes, rolls, crackers, and fast foods, are converted to simple sugar in your body. Along with the huge serving sizes most Americans eat, processed carbs are the main reason most of us are so damn fat.

So have a sandwich every once in a while, but eat mostly fruits and vegetables.

Eat Vegetables with Every Meal

Vegetables are loaded with nutrients and antioxidants and most of us barely ever eat them. (Unless we're talking French fries.)

Plus they're incredibly nutrient dense without being calorically dense. That means you can eat a ton of vegetables without significantly bumping up your calories.

Here are a few ways to sneak them into your meals without even thinking about it:

1. Put them in your protein shake.

Although it sounds nasty, I swear you won't even taste the spinach or broccoli. Try it before you curse me.

2. Make stir-fry.

When you have vegetables mixed with chicken and covered in stir-fry soy sauce you won't even taste the veggies. They'll blend perfectly with the rest of the meal.

3. Buy bags of frozen vegetables.

If you know damn well you're not going to eat raw vegetables with every meal, buy a few bags of frozen peas and carrots or mixed vegetables and re-heat them on the stovetop. It only takes about 10 minutes and goes perfectly with leftover burgers or chicken.

Drink a Gallon of Water Per Day

Your body is 83 percent water. Your muscles are 75 percent water and your brain is 74 percent water. Think it'd be a good idea to constantly replenish your body with clean water so all of your organs can function at their highest level? Of course you do.

Why a gallon? No real reason, except for most people barely drink any water at all. A gallon is measurable. Suggestions like drink 8 glasses of water per day are *fine if* you can see those eight glasses.

Take a gallon jug, fill it with water, and keep it in your fridge. Drink a big glass every morning when your first wake up, and have a glass with every meal.

By the end of the day, that sucker better be empty.

Clean Slate — Do the Next Positive Thing

Let's say you're on a diet where you're trying to skip processed carbs. Things are going well till Wednesday when you're out at a restaurant and starving.

The waitress brings you a plate of warm bread and olive oil before your meal.

You try to fight the urge to not eat the bread, but soon find yourself tearing a roll open and dipping it in the oil.

If you're like most people you'll beat yourself up over it, say, “fuck it”, and make the whole meal a carb-laden free-for-all. You'll have another piece of bread and may even order some pasta now that you're “off your diet.”

Instead of screwing up the rest of your meal — and perhaps the rest of your day — try wiping the slate clean instead. (This is a great tip I got from Dr. John Berardi and Precision Nutrition, by the way.)

Forgive yourself for being a dumb-ass and eating the roll, then take the next positive step.

You could give the plate of bread back to the waitress to take away. Or you could drink your water and order a salad with chicken.

Whatever the next positive thing is, make sure to do it.

Wipe the slate clean and forget about the past. Focus on what you're doing now and the very next thing you can do to stay on track with your goals.

Throw Away Things that Are Bad for You

Yeah, it's simple advice but how many of us actually follow it? Shit, in my cupboard right now I have a box of crackers that were leftover from a couple of recent meals. (You haven't made a great burger until you've crunched up a few butter crackers and mixed them with ground beef, egg, mustard, and Italian parsley.)

In fact, as soon as I get done writing this sentence I'm going to throw it out.

Why? Because I don't need the processed carbs. Sure, I could save it for the next time I make those particular burgers, but I'm not planning on it any time soon. They'll be stale by then, anyway.

Go through your cupboards and fridge and throw away anything you *know* is bad for you.

If you don't have it in your house, you can't eat it.

Wake and Shake

Most people skip breakfast because "it takes too long." Usually it just means they did a terrible job of planning their morning, but we all know what it's like to be hurried. Still, breakfast is something that shouldn't be skipped.

When you're rushed, make what Precision Nutrition calls a "super shake", a healthy protein-rich shake you can drink on the go.

Check out this [blog](#) for a list of 100 super shakes created by my blog readers.

Buy Made-for-You Lunches

Forget most pre-made meals you can find in the aisles of grocery stores. (Lunchables, anyone?)

When you don't feel like cooking do what I do and head to your local health food store like Whole Foods or Trader Joe's and check out their selection of pre-made meals in the deli cases.

They usually stock cooked organic chicken breasts, steak, and salmon, along with different vegetable and bean medleys, fresh salad fixings and more.

A full meal will only run you six to eight bucks.

The Only Kitchen Utensils You Need

When I was a kid, my mom taught me how to make scrambled eggs. Ever since that day, I liked to cook for myself. (Although I could only cook eggs for a few years.)

Pop-quiz, hot shot: how many of your friends can cook?

I'd be surprised if it was more than a couple.

Taking care of yourself is more than knowing how to tie your shoes or use an ATM card. You need to be able to cook.

Know why most people don't? They're scared. They never learned how.

But that's all right. It's a perfect time to learn.

When it comes to cooking, you only really need a few basic tools for 99% of meals.

1 large omelet pan (I prefer Calphalon)

1 large pot

- 1 baking sheet
- 1 cutting board
- 1 mixing bowl
- 1 rubber spatula
- 1 chef's knife (I prefer the Kyocera ceramic knife)

Once you have your materials, grab a cookbook, and try creating something. The only way you get good is to practice.

What to Do Now

Pick two of the following topics and follow and take the next positive step.

Screw Counting Calories

Eat Real Food

Eat Organic If You Can Afford It

Eat At Least Four Times per Day

Have Protein with Every Meal

Have Little to No Processed Carbohydrates

Eat Vegetables with Every Meal

Drink a Gallon of Water Per Day

If you picked “eat real food” and “have protein with every meal”, your next positive steps could be to get rid of all the shit in your fridge and cupboards that aren't real food, and go grocery shopping for enough lean meats and other protein sources to have at least one 40-gram serving at each meal.

If you picked “eat at least four times per day” and “drink a gallon of water”, your next positive steps could be to plan what meals and what time you'll eat, and buy a gallon water jug to keep in your fridge.

Whatever two you pick, make sure you outline an action step for each. Then do it.

Get some new kitchen utensils and pick up a few cookbooks. My favorites are:

[Gourmet Nutrition](#)

[Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution](#)

[Men's Health Muscle Chow](#)

Conclusion:

Pay It Forward

When I first started training clients and writing for magazines, Alwyn Cosgrove was one of my most influential mentors.

Alwyn, if you don't know, is one of the world's top coaches and a two-time cancer survivor. I first met him at a seminar where I walked up to him, handed him a book, and said, "You don't know me, but I want to thank you for all that you've done to help me."

(His articles and interviews were a big reason I started getting better results with my clients.)

From that point on, I could call or e-mail Alwyn whenever I needed training, business, or life advice. He's the reason I got my first quote in *Men's Health* magazine (which led to more work for MH and other magazines), and his advice helped my personal training business prosper.

Through it all, Alwyn never asked for payment or a favor of any kind. His only request for helping me was this:

Pay it forward.

Help trainers and writers who were beginning careers in the fitness industry. Help other people get in better shape and live better lives.

Over the past few years, I've tried my hardest to pay it forward through my blog, my interviews and articles, and meeting with people at seminars.

It feels damn good to pay it forward, which is why I'm encouraging you to do the same.

Hopefully you've picked up some tips in this book to help live a better life and build a better body.

I firmly believe that we have to take care of ourselves before we can help anyone else. Despite what people say, it's not selfish to do what you need to do to live a good life. It's not selfish to become your own hero. In fact, *it's selfish not to.*

When you're strong and motivated, you can help other people become strong and motivated.

When you're capable of setting goals, adopting behaviors, following habits, and accomplishing those goals, you can help others do the same.

So let's not forget that part of being a hero is helping people who are in trouble. (Trouble, by the way, can mean a lot of different things.)

Maybe there's someone at the gym who's not quite sure what to do. Offer to show them a new exercise or answer a few workout or nutrition questions.

Maybe you have a friend who's in debt and could use a few tips on how to get out. Tell him about the envelope system and give him some advice about paying off one card at a time.

Whatever you do, find a way to pay it forward.

Find a way to help someone else become *their* own hero.

The Wrap-Up and a Favor from Nate

If you've ever read a “free report” on the Internet, you'll know this is the part where you get hit with a crazy sales pitch. Something like this:

“I have a limited, special offer for you, but I only have 4 spots left! Buy now and you can get my magical new product/service/crap for 4 easy payments of \$299!”

Well, I'm not gonna do that.

The truth is I hope you found something useful in the Hero Handbook. I spent a lot of time writing these words (and a lot more time learning everything in this book) and it makes me happy to know I can reach a lot of people who want to become their own hero, build a better body, and live a great life.

That's why I decided to give this book away instead of sell it.

However, I do want to ask you for a favor.

If the Hero Handbook helped you in any way, I'd love if you spread it around to people who could also benefit from it. Yep, I'm asking you to send it to anyone you think it'll help.

Link to it on your blog. Share it on your Facebook wall. Print it out and leave it in the locker-room. Whatever.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to become their own hero. Sometimes all they need is a little information and a kick in the ass.

Let's give 'em both.

Thanks for reading,

-Nate

Thanks to the following people for their friendship, guidance, and inspiration

(In no particular order)

Mom and Dad

Austin and Jordan Green

Grandpa and Glenda

Richelle DeVoe

Jason Lengstorf

Kyle Hibler

Rob Farrington

Mike Scialabba

John Berardi

Phil Caravaggio

Alwyn Cosgrove

Lou Schuler

John Romaniello

Eric Cressey

Mike Robertson

Tim Ferriss

Sean Hyson
Chris Guillebeau
Daniel Clough
Craig Weller
Bryan Krahn
Taylor Selig
Geo Grigoryan
Tim Patterson
TC Luoma
Nate Steele
Casey Becker
Jason Brown
Dave Tate
Martin Rooney
Luka Hocevar

(If I missed anyone, I sincerely apologize. I'll buy you a beer the next time I see you.)

And a big thanks to you, the reader.

Thank you for reading this handbook. It means so much to me to have your support.

I hope this Handbook inspires you to take control of things you have control over, and live an amazing life on your terms.

About the Author

Nate Green has been featured in The LA Times, Men's Health, Men's Fitness, and has been a guest on top-ranked radio stations across the US. He's the author of *Built for Show* and the book you just finished reading. He is 25 years old.



To read more about him, [check out his blog](#).