



**LEARN TO TRUST YOURSELF:
HOW SMALL ACTIONS LEAD TO BIG CHANGE**
Shane Jackson

You have choices—an infinite number of choices. Too many to comprehend. And you are making choices even when you don't realize it.

Here are some statements that frustrate me:

"I don't have time."

As in, "I'd like to read more books, but I just don't have time." Uh, yeah, you do.

Here's another, much worse one:

"I had no choice."

As in, "I couldn't go to my son's soccer game because I had to work. I had no choice."

Uh, yeah, you did.

When we make statements like these, here is what we are really saying:

"I choose not to spend my time reading books because I would rather be on social media."

And:

"I didn't go to my son's soccer game because I decided to go make money instead."

Of course, when you say it that way, it sounds bad! Worse, it's kind of hurtful!

Are you saying I prioritize money over my kids? That I prefer to obsess on the latest conspiracy theory being bounced around social media instead of expanding my horizons through study?

No, I'm not saying that. You are. You are saying it through your choices.

You decide your actions and your reactions. You choose how and where to put your focus.

No one pried your eyes open with toothpicks and made you look at your phone. Or dragged you away from your child's soccer game at gunpoint and forcefully made you go to work. You chose to use your time that way.

Now, I'm not saying they were bad choices. Maybe you could have watched the soccer game but not had enough money to feed your child when the game was over. Going to work sounds like a good decision. Or maybe you needed some mindless social media distraction to let yourself rest before engaging in something important and taxing. Prioritizing rest for yourself is important. I'm just saying, whatever choices you are making—own them. They aren't dictated by others. They are entirely on you.

Which means you get to control you. Well, not all of you.

There are many things you have no control over. You can't control where you were born or who your parents are. You can't control your IQ or how athletic you are. You can't control how tall you are or attractive you are (plastic surgery aside). Until we become able to modify our own genetic code, you are stuck with the genes you inherit.

In fact, you can't control most of the things that happen during your life. You can't control the people around you. You can't control their actions or how they feel about you. You can't control the environment you're in, whether there is a rule of law where you live, or if people with power are able to mistreat and abuse others. You can't control nature and its destructive effects—storms, earthquakes, and tornados or bacteria, viruses, and cancers.

But there are other parts of your life, the most important parts, that you control. You decide your actions and your reactions. You choose how and where to put your focus. You decide who you will help or if you will help others at all. You choose how to respond to your emotions. You choose how to spend your energy.

Everyone, regardless of life circumstance, controls these most essential things.

Read that list again and think about that. Regardless of where you live, your physical makeup, how others treat you, what tragedies occur, and even your health, you control how you act and react.

If you are fortunate, you control much, much more. Most likely, you control a whole list of things such as what you eat, where you work, when you work, what you wear, where you live, who you associate with, what you read, what you watch, who you listen to, and who you ignore. The list could go on and on.

LEARNING TO TRUST YOURSELF

New Year's resolutions are notoriously useless. One study said that only 9 percent of adults keep their resolutions all year, and 23 percent abandon them in the first week. I have no idea if this is right, but it certainly feels plausible.

I love to ask people about their New Year's resolutions. Some of them are inspiring and I copy them.

But some of them (and I apologize if I offend you) are downright ridiculous.

"I'm going to run a marathon this year!"

"Have you ever run a 5K before?"

"Nope."

Good luck with that.

"This year, I'm going to get debt free!"

"Is your paycheck more than your debt payments?"

"Nope."

Uh huh.

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It's no wonder that we don't think we can live purposely. All the things we associate with purposeful living—great relationships, self-discipline, peace of mind, achievement—are so beyond us that when we try it's embarrassing.

Here's my favorite. This is the summary of an actual conversation I had with someone a few years ago.

"Did you make New Year's resolutions?"

"Yes, but I know I won't do them."

"Then why did you make them?"

"I like having goals."

Wow.

One of the most important traits we can develop is trust in ourselves. When we regularly make promises to ourselves and keep them, we begin to develop the confidence we need to set bigger and bigger goals. If I can't trust myself to do small things, then I can't trust myself to do big things. When I regularly set and achieve my goals, then I start to believe I am someone who does what they say they will do. That gives me the confidence to take the risk of setting bigger goals.

This isn't just about starting small. It's about learning the value of compounding.

There is a statement that's often attributed to Albert Einstein: "Compound interest is the most powerful force in the universe."

Now, it's doubtful that Einstein really said that, but whoever did was onto something.

Let's say you borrow \$10,000 with an interest rate of a mere 1 percent per month. That means the first month you are only charged \$100 interest so now you owe \$10,100. That doesn't sound too bad. Then the next month you are charged interest on the \$100 also, so the second month interest is \$101 with a balance of \$10,201. Only one dollar more—no big deal.

After a year, you look at your statement and see that you owe \$11,156.68 and were charged \$110.46 in interest that month. Huh. That's 10 percent more than you paid the first month. Still doable, I guess.

Because it feels so small, you forget about the loan for a while until five years later and you get a notice in the mail saying that the loan is coming due, and you now owe \$20,268 and are being charged more than \$200 a month in interest.

Wait a minute. I thought this was only charging me \$100 a month in interest? How did it double?

That's compound interest. Small amounts multiplied by small amounts grow to big amounts over time. Compound interest can be painful for the borrower, but it can be wonderful for the lender. The small, purposeful actions that you implement in your life compound. They don't just add to your life, they multiply.

Living purposely isn't going from the couch to a marathon, it's starting by taking the stairs. And then pretty soon you are strong enough to walk a trail. And then run a mile. Then five miles. Then twenty-six.

Every step allows you to experience the rewards of purposeful living, which not only makes you want to do more, but also makes you aware of what else you can do.

If your relationship with your spouse is struggling, there is no magic wand you can wave and suddenly become healthy again. But you can start doing something small like putting down the cell phone and simply listening. After a while, when your partner starts to feel heard, you can start engaging in deeper conversations.

If you have been stuck in a job that you don't enjoy and could do in your sleep, you're probably not going to be able to change to a new dream job overnight. But you can start taking courses to learn new skills that will open other opportunities.

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If you feel called to address the plight of at-risk children, you aren't going to be able to save them all in one day. But you can get involved in the life of one child, which may help you understand how to help even more children.

Wherever you decide to focus, the point is just to get going. There is an old saying in business that "activity brings activity." The idea is that the more you are doing, the more likely you are to find things to do. Pick up the phone and call someone. Send an email. Do some research. Visit a friend. Pick something small and achievable to start with and let it snowball from there.

SURROUNDED BY CHOICES

I have a friend who spent years studying habits. How are they formed? How long does it really take to make something a habit? I knew that he had planned to write a book to help people understand how to form the good habits that would help them be successful, but the book never came. One day I asked him why he never wrote the book.

"Well," he said. "After all that study, I realized I'm not sure that there is such a thing as a good habit. There are certainly bad habits. But the good things we need to do to be successful? Those never become habitual; they require constant choice."

The good news is that you get to choose what you do. The bad news is that you get to choose what you do.

I like this quote from author and journalist Oliver Burkeman:

We try to avoid the intimidating responsibility of having to decide what to do with our finite time by telling ourselves that we don't get to choose at all—that we must get married, or remain in a soul-destroying job, or anything else, simply because it's the done thing.

This is on you. There is no one else to blame. Whether you read the book or scroll to another post. Whether you sleep in or go to the gym. Whether you stay in the toxic relationship or walk away. Whether your work has meaning or is mere drudgery.

Whether you live a life of purpose or merely a life of pleasure. Whether you live the life you will have wished you had or spend your days feeling regret. You get to choose. Over and over and over again.

Starting right now. 📖



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shane Jackson leads Jackson Healthcare®, identified by Forbes as one of America's largest private companies, and serves as the primary guiding force for its mission of improving the delivery of patient care and the lives of everyone it touches.

An advocate for the power of business leaders as a positive force for people and the community, Shane is an engaging storyteller who frequently speaks and writes on the topics of intentionally nurturing a values-based culture and leveraging influence to do good in the world. In addition to having served as a contributor to media outlets, including Forbes and Fast Company, he shares insight into leadership, culture, and living with purpose on his website, ShaneJackson.com.

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