



From Average to
AWESOME
Lessons for Living an Extraordinary Life

Jim Smith, Jr.

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Alexandria, Virginia

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Develop a Committed, Disciplined Approach for Handling Your Challenges

Jim Smith Jr.

When you find yourself overwhelmed, I suggest that you keep it simple. Narrow your focus to the things you can control and the outcomes you want to achieve. Approach all the other variables with flexibility and a positive attitude. Also avoid beating yourself up if things don't go 100 percent as planned.

—LAURA BRUNER, AUSTIN

When was the last time you plopped down at the dinner table, starving, impatiently waiting for someone to bless the food? Before the prayer, you scanned the table to see how you were going to pile and position everything onto your plate when something voluminous caught your eye: At the

end of the table was a plump, mouth-watering, perfectly seasoned, stuffed turkey.

Do you recall the time when the only thing that stood between your appetizer and your dessert was a delicious, eight-hour-marinated, golden-brown baked chicken—guarded by brown rice and grilled vegetables? Just thinking about those two meals makes me hungrier than a famished, frustrated dieter after a Jenny Craig dinner.

Nevertheless, if one of those two entrees were in my knife and fork's immediate consumption range, I would not pretend to be a Pac man with a screen full of dots. Common sense and eating decorum would prevail. I would nonchalantly cut off a wing, then a drumstick, then some scrumptious white meat. But I can almost guarantee that, like a patron at an all-you-can-eat buffet, I would return for second and third helpings, yet in good taste—and it would taste good, too!

You're probably asking yourself, "How do these feasting tips relate to moving from average to awesome?" Hang in there, my friend, I'm going to feed your interest.

*Consider This: "Definiteness of purpose
is the starting point of all achievement."
—Clement Stone*

When your problems, concerns, or "to-do's" lie before you with all the variety and expansiveness of a Thanksgiving feast, why don't you wade through them one at a time—first a wing, then a drumstick, then a thigh? Like impatient people who dump salt and pepper on their food before they've even tasted it, some people attempt to consume their entire "to-do" list or stack of problems all at once. Any dietitian or psychologist will tell you that you can get sick that way.

The insanity-inducing scenarios usually play out as follows. First, we assess all that's in front of us and then become overwhelmed, complaining to others how much we have to do. Or, second, we assess all that's in front of us, make a to-do list, and then remain immobilized with a severe case of paralysis by analysis. Or, third, we dejectedly assess all that's in front of us, begin attacking everything at once, become frustrated because nothing gets thoroughly accomplished, and then have another pity party about everything that remains on our plate. Then, before we can even see the white of our plate, we volunteer for and take on more stuff. And during all this shuffling, hustling, and running around, life leaves more poop on our doorstep.

People who have moved from average to awesome optimistically start by first cutting off a wing.

Many time-management experts would disagree, however, citing the merits of aggressively wrapping your arms around the most difficult or challenging item on your list first. Save the smaller items to be the bread that soaks up the gravy, mussel sauce, and crumbs that remain on your plate, they insist. I don't know about others, but I relish getting little wins under my belt first, building up a head of steam and some momentum. When I have multiple tasks in front of me, I assess my list, prioritize, and then get busy. And getting busy means generally picking some of the low-hanging fruit (that is, a wing, to mix my metaphors) first, then moving on to weightier tasks.

We become frazzled when we think we're carrying the entire world on our shoulders. We feel beat down, exasperated, put upon. But it's an all-too-familiar feeling. Whether they're work-related issues or home-based horror stories, our "feeling overloaded" complaints are innumerable. After a while, we begin to sound the same. That's why people stop listening to us.

Unfortunately, tackling overflowing "to-do" lists is not the only way we subject our resolve to a stress test. Consider those



AWESOME ADVICE

One of the things I do is focus on what I want to create in my life instead of focusing on what hasn't worked or what might not work. I think of what I want, and then I work toward achieving that.

When “deficit” thinking starts to occur, I talk about it—either to confidants who I know will not simply indulge in my “pity party” or to someone who I know will have a perspective that will keep me balanced.

I also do self-talk where I say to myself: “So what’s this about?” “Why are you going there?” “What are you going to do about it?”

—Deloris Davis, Philadelphia

instances when we seek to make professional and personal life changes. We read books; listen to self-help tapes and CDs; seek guidance and direction from friends; watch inspirational, educational infomercials, DVDs, or television shows on PBS; and attend motivational speaking events. However, similar to the way we handle our piles of professional and personal laundry, we move hastily, putting into motion plans for three thousand life-altering changes in five minutes. That's more pressure than rushing to the airport in a city you're unfamiliar with, with a drop of gas left in your rental car gas tank, to catch your flight (the last one of the night).

There's a better way. When the hills of pressures and tasks get so high that you need a trampoline to see over them, or when you're about to make significant life changes, take an extremely deep breath, again, again, then start with a wing. Incorporate these 10 steps:

1. Make a list of everything you want to do, then prioritize your list.
2. Take time to visualize yourself accomplishing everything and how you're going to feel when the tasks are complete.
3. Next to each "to-do," list a timeframe, an action (that is, how you're going to do it), the tools or resources you're going to need, and a measurement (how will you know when that task is completed).
4. List those people whom you'll get to assist you.
5. Make a plan B list as well. In the event your plan A doesn't work, you will need a backup.
6. Determine how you're going to reward yourself once you've completed half of your list and how you're going to reward yourself when your list is totally accomplished.
7. Begin with several less complicated tasks or changes that you can execute quickly. That will help you build momentum and positive energy.

8. Vigorously go after your other priorities, one at a time.
9. When Mrs. Doubtfire, Brother But, and Sister Settle start to visit your subconscious, consider the consequences of not completing your assignment. Then just do it.
10. Maintain an extremely positive outlook the entire time. Don't waver, regardless of how things may seem. If you run into a rut, reread chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 of this book. Envision yourself winning! Envision yourself getting through the piles! Envision yourself at that new place—the new, more empowered, less emotionally drained you, minus the entire residue of the past.

I create lists nearly every day. My lists are my security blankets. However, regardless of how many tasks I include, I start with a wing.

Moving from Average to Awesome

This chapter is not only about time management. It's also about how you can better address “being swamped” before becoming overwhelmed. This exercise will help you move from an average mindset to a more positive and powerful awesome way of living.

First, consider which statement describes how you think about being weighed down and snowed under:

- **Average:** You try to accomplish everything (work, home tasks, personal changes, and the like) at once. You become overwhelmed by the number of tasks that await you.
- **Awesome:** You're developing a committed, disciplined disposition for handling the challenges that greet you every day. You're maintaining that same resourceful, resilient approach when it comes to making personal life changes.

Second, take some time and consider the questions below. Respond to the questions and be sure to explain your answers. Finally, rate yourself on your progress. If you are currently average, say so (A). If you feel you deserve an awesome rating, indicate that as well (AW). If you are neither average nor awesome but working toward being awesome, just write W.

Getting to Awesome

Key questions	Your response and explanation	Rating
How do you prioritize your tasks?		
What other factors tend to get in the way that seem to make your load even heavier?		
What do you do that contributes to your state of feeling overwhelmed?		

Rate your progress: average (A), awesome (AW), or working toward awesome (W).