

# Form a Fitness Game Plan



A FREE E-BOOK FROM

 **I AM RUNNING THIS**  
by *Kelly Caizzo*

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# Introduction

I'm not a fast runner. I don't like burpees or jumping jacks. It's unlikely I'll ever win an age category award or run a full marathon.

But I excel at forming fitness goals that excite me and achieving them while having fun in the process.



It all started with Couch to 5k. My youngest child was 4 months old, my oldest not yet 2. I was exhausted and overwhelmed and I knew something had to change.

So I started running. 60 seconds of running became 90 seconds, which morphed into 5 minutes.

Nine weeks later I ran my first 5k.

It helped. I fell in love with having fitness be a large part of my life. I kept creating new fitness goals and finding ways to love the journey, even though there were failures and pitfalls along the way.

I went from a 5k to half marathons. I learned to swim as an adult and did two open water sprint triathlons. And in 2017 I took 50 different classes at my gym, including three kinds of Tabata and 9 yoga classes.

Since 2013, I've blogged my fitness journey on [iamrunningthis.com](http://iamrunningthis.com). This workbook is a summary of the best strategies for goal formation and success, based on four years of reading, trying new things and reflecting along the way.

# How to Use This Workbook

If you do the work, by the end of this e-book you will have a thoughtfully formed goal and a realistic plan for achieving it.

I've organized the advice I've found most helpful into the order I think is best for forming a fitness plan. I pause to ask questions, giving you space for your responses.

## **The real value of this workbook is what you add to it.**

This workbook is meaningless by itself. Its sole purpose is to bring forward what you know about yourself, and help you organize it into a goal and a plan that fits *you*.

Most of what you'll find here isn't new. It's all been said before in some iteration or another. It's the order that's new; my offering to you via this workbook is pairing the advice with each planning stage.

Much of the advice is self-evident. It'll either ring true for you, or it won't.

Take what helps. Discard what doesn't. Notice what won't work for you and use it as an opportunity to learn about yourself.

Let's get started!

# What Works For Others May Not Work For You

## Know Yourself

When we love something, we tend to enthusiastically recommend it to people we love. But what someone else loves (and tirelessly recommends) might not be for you. Someone else's time-management or accountability strategies might be perfect for them but a poor match for your needs or personality.

**Are you an introvert or an extrovert?** Maybe that can help you decide whether you should try audio-books for your long run or look for a running buddy.

**Are you a morning person or a night person?** (Keep in mind that everyone will do best when they get enough sleep.) If you are a night person and you dread your morning workout, maybe you'd enjoy fitting it into a lunch break or making it part of your evening routine. Don't let some fitness magazine touting morning workouts keep you from working out after dinner and loving it.

**Love routine?** Maybe working out at a set time of day or signing up for lessons or training sessions where they're on the calendar will work well for you. Prefer to be more spontaneous? You might feel trapped if you carve out a set time to exercise and do better with a weekly goal that gives you day-to-day flexibility.

When you take time to form a fitness plan that matches your personality and your needs, you'll find that you look forward to it more and it's easier to accomplish.

# Define Your Why

Any good fitness plan starts with “why”. Why do you want to make fitness part of your life? Identifying and prioritizing the top few reasons will help you define a goal that aligns with whatever motivates you.

A fitness plan that honors your true reason for wanting to exercise is more likely to be successful, and knowing what your priorities are can help you trim down your fitness ambitions if necessary without losing your initial purpose.

One of the biggest “whys” is health. If health is your number one goal, you don’t need an overly ambitious fitness goal that might be overkill and could sabotage your long-term enjoyment of fitness.

If health is your reason, what does health mean for you? Protecting your mobility and flexibility as you age with a weekly yoga class? Going for a run because cardio has been shown to be effective at helping to alleviate depression? Strength training so it’s easier to lift your toddler in and out of their crib and carry them all over the place?

Maybe health isn’t your number one reason. Maybe a sense of accomplishment, or the chance to be social with friends who are active, or the desire to join that tennis league are what really motivates you and health is just a side benefit.

Brainstorm your reasons. Make sure your goal honors the most important ones.



# Define Your Parameters

Before you form a goal, it helps to define your resources and constraints.

We often set our sights on a goal and then try to find the time and resources we need to achieve it. That's like car shopping without a budget, picking a fantastic car, and then trying to find a way to pay for it. It can work, but it's less frustrating and more realistic if you go in with a budget.

What's your fitness "budget"?

Look at your typical week. How much time can you commit to being active? How much money can you budget for classes, gear or a gym membership?

What are your constraints? Will you need support of a partner to help care for children so you can work out? Do you have a rigid work schedule? Are you operating on a tight budget? How close are you to gyms or fitness studios?

What are your greatest resources? Do you have family close by? A supportive spouse? Flexible work schedule? Active friends or neighbors? Do you own a treadmill, or have streaming video services with workout videos?

Brainstorm a list of your resources and constraints so they can be in the back of your mind as you form your goal.



# Resources

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# Constraints

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# Ask "Then What?"

In her book The Joy Diet, Martha Beck recommends asking "Then what?" as a tool to trouble-shoot our goals.

*"Ask 'Then what?' Imagine what your life will be like when your desire is fulfilled. If what follows is as satisfying as the goal itself, you've got a winner."*

—Martha Beck, The Joy Diet

Asking "then what?" can help us identify better fitness goals for ourselves. In Gretchen Rubin's book Better Than Before I read about someone whose fitness goal was to achieve a six pack before his 30th birthday. He achieved that goal, but there was no "then what?" waiting for him. He didn't enjoy the required exercise enough to maintain the six pack, and earned fleeting satisfaction at best.

Sometimes a "one and done" bucket list goal is satisfying. Many people plan to run a marathon just once in order to have the memory of that achievement, and the satisfaction of having worked hard towards a challenging goal. Sometimes the "then what" after a big endurance race is that consistent 10-15 mile weeks are easy enough to be enjoyable, enabling them to become happy life-long runners. Or the "then what" is they have proof of their own grit and determination that will help them tackle future endeavors.

Working on your pace so you can join a friend for a run or participate in an activity is wonderful, because the "then what" reward is your ability to participate.

Beware “then what” answers that focus on external praise. Why do we think a man might want a six pack before his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday? Did he hope that looking a certain way would positively impact his relationships with other people by impressing peers or attracting a significant other?

I can’t recommend running a marathon so you can impress your neighbors or going to the gym hoping that weight loss will improve your relationship with your spouse. There are more efficient ways to strengthen our relationships. (When exercise does improve our relationships, it’s usually because it boosts our mood rather than changes how we look!)

Write Your “Then What” Here:

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# Form Your Fitness Goal

Armed with your end in mind and knowledge of your resources and constraints, you're ready to form a goal that fits you.

Most goals fall into two categories.

## 1. A Consistency Goal

*I will work out x times a week*

## 2. An Achievement Goal

*I will bench press x weight, or run x distance*

### **Consistency Goals:**

The strength of a consistency goal is it rewards effort, which can be easier to control than results. The weakness is that it can be derailed by illness or unexpected schedule conflicts. It helps to average a consistency goal over time, so you can stay motivated and still achieve your goal despite occasional setbacks (because they're part of life!).

### **Achievement Goals:**

Achievement goals are wonderful because they challenge you to work towards something specific and see the results of your work in a tangible way. They're tricky because they need to be realistic.

If you're planning an achievement goal, your strategy for meeting your goal will likely require some consistency sub-goals.

# What's Your Fitness Goal?

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**If it's a consistency goal, how have you built in a buffer for the unexpected? If it's an achievement goal, why do you think it's realistic?**

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# Troubleshoot Your Goal

Here are some common reasons goals fail.

## **They're Too Defined**

"I want to run a sub 2-hour half marathon by September!" This goal has three variables defined: distance, pace, and deadline. It's hard to control how quickly we improve, even with a great training plan. This goal has no wiggle room.

Improve a restrictive goal by making it more flexible. If this was a first half marathon, it would make sense to remove the 2-hour time goal and stick to running a half marathon by September. An experienced half marathoner might remove the September deadline, but keep the sub 2-hour goal.

## **They're Unrealistic**

Not only would some goals require too much sacrifice and destroy your life balance, some goals are literally outside our ability to achieve. Injury or disillusionment wait for those of us who throw caution completely to the wind.

A full Ironman triathlon or qualifying Boston Marathon time are not in many people's future. That's ok. There are plenty of goals that will scare and thrill you that *are* realistic.

Make peace with your best being different from someone else's. Embrace having balance in your life, and be realistic about your goals. Consider your past

performance and your current fitness level when you form your goals, and re-evaluate them if you struggle.

### **They're Not the Right Starting Point**

Maybe your goal is a great long-term goal, but is too long-term to be motivating now. Consider focusing on a short-term goal that will work up to it.

Or perhaps your goal is too easy or repetitive to feel exciting or challenging. We're more likely to be over-ambitious, but the opposite can also drain our motivation. If you're working towards the same goal you've done in previous years, or your goal is a "gimme" that you'll achieve it, you might find it more inspiring if you mix it up or make it more challenging.

## Is Your Goal:

Flexible    Realistic    The Right Place to Start

*If needed, write a revised goal below:*

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# Make Time

Time is often the biggest challenge when it comes to making fitness a part of our lives. How you make time will be as personal as your goal itself, but here are some strategies that have helped me and others in the past.

**Do a Time Audit:** How do you spend your time now? For one week, write a brief summary at the end of each day of how you spent your time. Look for inefficiencies or things that can go.

**Shift Your Bedtime:** Go to bed earlier and get up earlier to exercise. Keep your waking time consistent and use the extra hour on non-workout days to complete other early morning tasks like getting a head start on your e-mails, reading a book, or meal planning. We often are less productive an hour before bed, so this swap can gain us productive time. (And maybe you can watch your favorite evening t.v. show on the treadmill instead!)

**Eat Leftovers:** Cook once, eat twice. When you're making soup or lasagna set aside a portion prior to serving to go straight into the freezer. Designate a night of the week to be leftover night so you actually use the extra meals you freeze.

**Partner Up:** If you're a parent, find a friend who will reciprocate playdates or school drop offs to give you both extra time.

**Reclaim Your Lunch Break:** If you can work out on your lunch break and then eat at your desk, that'll add a lot of potential workout time to your week. No shower?



Maybe you can go for a walk and consider it active recovery, or use your lunch break to do a task you might save for after work or the weekend.

**Know How You Procrastinate:** How much time do you spend surfing the web or checking social media? See if you can create more time in your schedule just by focusing on the task at hand, whether you're at work or folding laundry.

**Use Your Commute:** I used to run next to the kids while they biked to school, or push them to preschool in the jogging stroller. Some people bike to work. It may not be possible, but it's wonderfully efficient if it is.

**Do Two Things at Once:** Get a headset so you can make phone calls while you de-clutter or fold laundry. Go to yoga class with your best friend instead of meeting for coffee and talk on the way there.

**Schedule Your Workouts:** Sit down in front of your calendar on Sunday and schedule your workouts for the week. Add them to the calendar.

**Outsource Something:** Childcare, grocery delivery services, laundry, lawn-care, housecleaning, errands... you name it, people have outsourced it. Bonus if you can outsource it a coworker or to someone in your household for free. (Sorry kids.)

**Be Efficient:** Make lists and meal plan so you can grocery shop less frequently. Run your errands all together to reduce travel time.



# Make a Plan

Now that you have a thoughtful goal and some plans for making time to achieve it, it's time to create a specific plan for success.

This will be very personalized depending on your goal, but here are some questions a good plan will address.

My finalized goal:

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## The training plan / expert help I will use:

**Do You Need Expert Help?** Do you know how to get started, or would you benefit from using a training plan, hiring a personal trainer, or asking an experienced friend for advice? When choosing a training plan, make sure it's an appropriate level for you.

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## Equipment and resources I need:

**What equipment or resources do you need?** Do you need to sign up for a gym with a pool, or buy running shoes? Find a yoga studio you like? If you can, try before you buy.

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## How I will stay motivated:

**How are you going to stay motivated?** Can you reward yourself along the way at certain benchmarks? Is your goal fun enough to be its own reward? Would posting your “why” where you can see it help?

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## I will hold myself accountable by:

**How will you hold yourself accountable?** Would it help you to tell friends and family about your goal and ask them to check in? How will you track your goal?

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# Do your best. Let that be enough.

Great! You have a plan! Now it's time to do your best... and be kind to yourself when it doesn't go as you planned. (Things rarely do.)

## **Self Compassion**

Our strongest way forward happens when we find balance between self-accountability and self-compassion. We can fall into the trap of thinking that being compassionate to ourselves when we fail will reinforce our tendency to fail. But when we've chosen the right goals, we'll be truly frustrated by our failure, and genuinely look forward to the chance to try again. We need to be kind to ourselves when something goes wrong, just as we would be kind to a child who wants to learn how to read and is struggling or who is upset because they missed soccer practice. Being kind to ourselves makes working towards a goal more achievable in the long-run. When we engage repeatedly in negative self-thoughts because we've missed a workout or performed under our expectations, each slip-up becomes a time when we don't just feel sad for the missed opportunity, we feel badly about ourselves. Over time, it can become easier and more appealing to ditch the long-term goal entirely so we can feel the failure once instead of every missed workout.

What happens when we're kind to ourselves when we have a day when we don't get out of bed for that run, or when we quit a swim workout early? Trying again is

easier, because we have a safety net of self-compassion for when we fail.

### **Examine Your Excuses**

Accepting failure without judging yourself doesn't mean you can't also hold yourself accountable. If you find yourself making a lot of excuses for missed workouts, think about whether they're genuine failures (ie, you tried and failed) or failures to try.

If you're failing at a high frequency, it may be a sign that you need to rethink your goal. Is it something you really want, or is it something you wish you wanted to achieve but really don't? When you fail, why are you failing? Does your goal need to change, or can your environment be adjusted to set yourself up for greater success?

Getting into a habit of failing and shrugging off your failures can also be self-defeating. In order to be motivating, a fitness plan has to feel achievable. If it's not working, revise it or ditch it rather than pretending you're still trying to achieve it and then feeling bad about not making it.



# Good Luck!

I hope this workbook has helped you to form a goal that reflects what you really want from fitness and a plan to get there.

Be true to yourself and work towards what you really want in the way that feels best to you.

Be kind to yourself, but firm and encouraging also. You'll know when you deserve compassion and when to roll your eyes at yourself and try again tomorrow.

If it's not working, start fresh with a new goal or strategy. Success is built on many failures. Check in with yourself, be willing to revise, and keep moving forward.

Look for role models. The octogenarian in yoga class. The grandparent running the half marathon. There are incredible reasons to keep going and to keep strategizing until fitness becomes part of who you are.

And feel free to reach out. I would love to hear from you. No, seriously, I would LOVE to hear from you. My favorite thing about writing is the conversations it starts. Getting an e-mail from someone who's been inspired by my blog makes my day.

I'm excited when I get a question, and thankful when I get an idea from someone.

In fact, the whole idea for this e-book came from a reader. Many thanks to my friend who sent me this in

reply to a post about creating content for a workshop I'm presenting:

*"I'd love to hear you talk about how to create a plan to succeed. You could share a template and a set of questions that would help me understand my own challenges and roadblocks, and walk through tips and pitfalls, based on your experience."*

If this book helps you form your goal, know that it was her constructive comments that inspired it.

Keep the conversations going, and best wishes as you make fitness a part of your life!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the word.

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