

The Comeback Manifesto

The ultimate guide to getting you back on your feet.

Brendan Haughey

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A Note from 2026

I wrote The Comeback Manifesto in 2019. I was 28, in debt, drinking too much, and trying to climb out of a hole I had dug myself. One weekend I sat down and put on paper the specific stuff that had actually worked for me. Not theory. Not motivation. The cheap loud alarm clock across the room. 60 to 67 degrees in the bedroom. F.lux on the phone, blackout curtains, no eating two hours before bed. Cancel the subscriptions. Throw out the alcohol. Run four times a week. Pay off the debt before you do anything else. Buy the cheap protein, eggs, salad mix, rice.

I am republishing it in 2026 with almost nothing changed. Most of it still holds. Sleep is still the lever. Environment still beats motivation. Action still comes before the feeling. Take responsibility, write the action items, do the things on the list. The framework did not need an update.

What I would add now is this: the framework is correct, but it leaks. I knew at 28 that motion creates emotion. I still missed runs. I still drank when I told myself I would not. The original Manifesto had no consequence layer. It assumed I would hold myself to it. Some weeks I did. Most weeks the goal sat on paper and the day went sideways anyway.

That gap is why I built FineStreak. Not as another habit tracker. As the missing closer. You set the goal, you put real money on it, you check in daily, and if you skip the day you pay the fine. Skin in the game beats willpower every time.

If you are at the lowest point right now and you found this PDF: read it. Do the steps. Then come find me at

finestreak.com.

Brendan, April 2026

Forward

I wrote this book as a result of my efforts to know and understand how to help myself. My life has been good but it wasn't a linear path. There have been massive ups and downs. I can't claim that any of this information is mine, just a collection of knowledge I stumbled on when I sought answers to my own problems when I fell off course.

My hope for you is that you find some answers for yourself. There is a whole lot of self help out there in the world but I wanted something that provides a clear path for you when you find yourself in the lowest points in your life, lost in confusion.

I believe these are the moments that make us. The hardship and trials that create meaning for the highs of life. Only by pushing through life's challenges, can we become stronger.

I encourage you to look honestly at your life and its problems. Resolve to be a person who will overcome any obstacles and who will seek out the knowledge to do so.

- Brendan

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What went wrong?

When life loses its certainty its time to take a second look

This book starts at your lowest point.

Begin the steps immediately after you have the thought, “How did I end up in this life position?” When you realize that your life is going the wrong direction and you feel it in your gut.

The Reward System in your brain is not working right.

Normally, we have a healthy sense of reward for the different activities we engage in. But every reward can lose its effect when we over engage in instantly gratifying behavior. We chose to feel good in the short run while affecting our happiness over all.

In order to satisfy the high level of reward stimulus we have become addicted to we become trapped in a cycle of quickly avoiding the low points in our lives and reaching for activities we know are quick to reward us. Our healthy appreciation for delayed reward is no longer our reality.

We need to take the time to create healthy new connections in our brains. This book is designed specifically to get you on your own feet and push you into action. The introspection, self loathing, and anxiety end here.

Step 1.

Stop what you are doing right now

Immediately stop all destructive behavior that currently dominates your life. Identify what is you don't like about your life.

Look at your failures honestly and determine the decisions you have made that led to them.

Life is just a series of decisions. While chaotic and unpredictable, many of the problems we have are results of poor decision making.

These are decisions we simply hadn't thought through. Now is the time to slow down all together and look at the whole thing.

What were the decisions you made?

What reasons did you initially have for them?

What resulted from those decisions?

What was the better option that you haven't considered?

Create space and time for this. Demand it.

Step 2.

Take Responsibility

Accept that you are completely responsible for your life

We can't move on from our problems until we take complete responsibility for them. Even if the problem is another person we still choose how we respond.

In order to create change you need to take back control.

Accept that you alone are responsible for making the changes that you want in your life.

Step 3.

Write out your action items

Grab a pen and paper

Define what it is that you need to do to in order to get life handled in four areas: Health, Wealth, Environment, and Social Life.

Make one big section for each category.

You can consult the four sections of this book to determine what actions will help you specifically.

Action items include verbs and will either be something you need to do or you need to stop doing.

Don't think, just throw them on paper as fast as possible then we will examine them. Keep them general, we can add more specific actions after.

View My Personal Example at the back of this book.

Be extremely honest and aggressively cut out all of the bullshit in your life. This is your own paper and it's just you here. Nobody else will get you out of this.

Let's get specific

Take each action item and write out the steps needed to accomplish each one.

Do not delay the action result with filler steps.

For example if you are a smoker and want to stop don't add "Step 1. Reduce to one pack a day". Stopping smoking is a

one step process.

A better action would actually be throw cigarettes away and step 2 never smoke again.

This is an emergency. I can't stress enough that you need to be aggressive.

Take Action

Now that you have your action items out on paper it's time to start doing.

Determine the TOP 5 things you can do first that will make the biggest difference the fastest. In the following sections I will lay out priorities for each area.

Secondly, circle the items that you can realistically do that day.

Now that you have your tasks you need to start immediately. You will not feel like it. You won't be motivated and you won't even be sure it will work or that it will last. This is not something you can avoid but you need to understand.

The next thing you need to know is that motion creates emotion. The more you do, the more you feel like doing. The more you feel like doing, the easier it gets.

You cannot afford to second guess yourself or look externally for feedback.

Do not tell people what you are doing. This is because when you talk about doing it means you are not doing. What you are actually doing is stroking your ego which will feel good temporarily, just like every other thing that got you into this position.

You are now an action taker and you live in action. A true master is purely in action in whatever they do. Let this process teach you.

One more thing, there is no failure, only feedback.

Failure is just a decision and not one you are going to make.
Decide to be an action taker and a student of results.

Health

You need to get your biology in check first

Your brain can only help you if it is running optimally.

Many people are fighting their entire biology, not just the circumstances of life. Your internal world reflects your outer. Start within and work your way out.

SLEEP!

Sleep is the number one thing that fucks you up. Our physical health, our happiness, and our drive, is severely limited when we don't sleep.

Here's how you get good sleep:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time. Buy a second, old-school alarm that does two things well: is loud as hell and has an alarm clock. Place it on the far end of the room so you have to actually get up to turn it off.
- **Temperature:** we sleep optimally in a temperature of about 60 to 67 degrees Fahrenheit. To accomplish this start with your thermostat if you can control it. Next make sure your blanket isn't too heavy if you get hot at night. Also Tempurpedic beds are amazing but often hold a ton of heat. Find a bed that's comfortable but also doesn't get too hot. If you live in a hot area you can sleep with just a nice sheet. You can also buy a fan. Next you can open your window just slightly to get the right room temp.
- **Pro tip:** sometimes it's perfect for getting to sleep but the temperature will drop over night in a cold area. In this

case close your window and turn off the heat, buy an electric timer plug that controls electricity from the wall. Buy a small room heater and put it in a safe place. Set the timer to turn the heat on a full 15 min before you want to wake up. The heat will make it easy to get out of bed, a huge problem I solved with this method.

- If you are really a baller there is one more method I haven't tried but is sworn on by people like Tim Ferriss. It's called a Chilipad and it's a pad that goes under you and is temperature controlled. *(2026 update: it's now sold by sleep.me. Current Dock Pro system runs about \$1,299 to \$1,499 depending on size.)*
- Buy an amazing bed. You sleep for half of your life so invest in this. Again buy a comfortable bed but one that doesn't run too hot. I think the best solution is a spring bed with a tempurpedic mattress topper.
- Buy an amazing pillow, again, Tempurpedic is the shit.
- **Sound:** we need either complete silence or white noise to control our environment if we live in a loud area. Buy comfortable earplugs or white noise machine.
- **Exercise:** The best way to get great sleep is exercise, second to none. Do some cardio and weight training.
- **Light:** Our bodies actually create melatonin naturally to help us sleep except that we need a certain amount of darkness to release that chemical. Buy a high quality sleep mask (I personally use mine every day) or turn off your nightlight and buy blackout curtains. This means that they let no light in, you'll see them in hotels.

- **Presence:** All of the above methods are designed to still your mind when trying to sleep, practice meditative breathing to relax your body. Count your deep breaths to 10 and start over again if you lose count. I usually fall asleep before the 20th breath.
- Write out all of the tasks you have to do the next day on paper or in your phone so you can mentally shed those things and the worry of thinking about what you have to do.
- Play a relaxing game on your phone (with night mode on so you can start to relax your eyes). There's a fun one where you guide sand into pots with bamboo sticks.
- DO NOT surf the web or watch a video on your phone in bed. Ideally just don't even have your phone within reach of you when trying to sleep.
- Phone light, also known as blue light strains your eyes and makes it hard to relax. Put your phone on night mode and your computer as well. There's a great app called [F.lux](#).
- Remove the tv from your room as well. Your brain needs to be trained to associate your room with only two things: sleep and sex.
- **Shower before bed:** Being dirty is not great for sleep so make sure you are clean.
- Don't eat or drink too much for bed. Drink enough water to not be thirsty but not too much so that you will have to use the restroom in the middle of the night.
- Drink cold water to start chilling yourself to a nice sleeping temp. Don't eat 2 hrs before bed. Especially

carbs and desserts. Your body will metabolize the sugar and keep you very awake with all of the energy you just consumed.

- Don't drink alcohol before bed because while helping you fall asleep, it prevents actual, restful, REM sleep that we need and you will actually wake up earlier than your body needs to.

Diet and Exercise

- Drink lots of water, start every day with a glass of water to kickstart your body. A staggering amount of Americans are dehydrated ALL OF THE TIME. Think about that.
- Whenever you are angry, sad, or have a headache just think about how much water you have drank that day, probably not enough. It will seriously solve more than half of your bad moods.
- Pick one achievable exercise routine that you can do at least 4 times a week. If you never exercise just start with walking routine for a bit every day. Walking stimulates creativity and will help you reflect and center yourself as you make your come back. Also you'll probably find nice bits of social interaction. Your plan has to be achievable.
- Do not rely on a workout buddy. If you really need help finding something that works for you ask a fit friend to workout a few times. They will gladly show you what you can do and after will be too involved in their own workout so you won't be able to grow dependent on them. You have to rely on yourself so you can be intrinsically motivated.

- Eat low carb, high fat, and protein. Most Americans are addicted to carbs because they are basically metabolized as sugar. This is a hidden threat and we don't see it because we aren't taught this and it is part of our culture.
- Eat real, whole food. In general aim to cook and prepare as much real food as possible. I won't get into the vast amount of problems with processed food but the point is you want as much nutrients you can get. Also because your body takes longer to metabolize whole food you feel fuller longer and maintain a consistent blood sugar level.
- Maintain your blood sugar level. Back to carbs the biggest problem I face is that I can't even function or feel good at all when I am hungry.
- When starting out eating whole foods, aim to eat consistently and prepare healthy snacks to maintain your energy level. Eating unfulfilling food will bring you crawling back to the kitchen so fast.
- **Alcohol:** I recommend you stop drinking if this is a problem for you. For the sake of the comeback just stop entirely. Set a goal in the future that you can link to having a drink. Rewire drinking as a celebration of hard work and success. It makes partying more fun and you will feel better knowing it will be. If you are an alcoholic attend [AA meetings](#). It's a great program and a damn shame that it's only for alcoholics. I've only ever heard great things about it.
- Tobacco affects your health negatively in so many ways. It inhibits all of your motivations. You feel suppressed and trapped into it. It burns up all of your money and frankly, it's an escape.

- Soda, don't drink soda, it makes you fat faster than almost anything.
- Go for a hike alone. When I need to get my shit together I'll hike up a large hill nearby with my notebook and pen. Enjoy the feeling, the view, and reflect on your action items. Literally get a new perspective on your own life.
- Drugs, avoid drugs especially if they are causing the problem or costing you a lot of money.
- Find regular activities that keep you active. [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) is great, pickup soccer games, gym, fun runs.

Wealth

Handle your finances for peace of mind and long term security

- **PAY OFF ALL DEBT FIRST.** If you are in debt make this your number one priority. Pay it off aggressively and as fast as possible for your situation. Make a plan to pay it off and execute.
- Cancel all subscriptions and automatic payments you don't need. Spotify, Netflix, Amazon Prime.
- Refine all expenses to only the things critical to making your comeback.
- Stop eating out and go buy groceries right now. My cheap shopping list is: one cheap protein, eggs for breakfast, salad mix, a light dressing, and a cheap carb like rice.
- After your debt is paid save an emergency fund. Save 3 months of living expenses in a separate bank account.
- **AFTER YOU SAVE AN EMERGENCY FUND** open an account at another (online) bank and start a Roth IRA account. It's an account you can invest in for long term growth and is pre taxed so any growth made will be tax free.
- If you aren't being paid enough ask for a raise or quit your job. The best time to find a job is when you already have one. Know your value. Don't be afraid to switch careers if your field isn't paying enough. Life is very short.

- Be in the habit of doing more than you are paid for always. If you really do this you will never be paid enough (in a good way) and it will carry over to any job you have. Someone will always hire you.
- If you don't have a job do this: Create a list of all of your marketable skills, create a resume. Your job is now finding a job. No excuses. Spend half of your day finding jobs online and the other half walking in businesses to ask about employment even if you apply online you should seek to make the most personable impression you can. Dress nice and smile. Follow up in person and on the phone one week after every application. Do not forget this.
- If you need to upgrade your skills (you always do) find resources from experts in that field and do what they say. Backwards engineer your strategy by choosing the job you want and do everything you have to in order to be competitive or competent enough to do it. If you have the resources then go to school. You can also take a specific job course or learn for free online.
- Avoid commuting at all costs because it will cost you. If it's necessary then do what you have to do to. It is not worth your happiness.
- **Recreational Activities:** Choose cost effective activities that are productive. For example I need to focus on reading and writing instead of playing video games or going out drinking. You can go out and not drink.
- If you know you are going on an outing that costs money just be mindful and have a plan on how much you want to spend.

- **Eating out:** if you have to eat out then just order water and spend wisely. Go to places that give you the most value for example I'd rather go to chipotle than a pizza place. I will be more full and healthy and you can bet your ass I skip the guac.

Environment

Consider the affect of your environment on your life

You need to control your environment in order to succeed.

- If you have toxic friends or are around negativity, create space from them or cut them out entirely. If you live with them you will have to communicate and confront them in a nice and respectful way. Start with what you can control. You can control who you are around, you can control the things you look at on the web. Learn how to handle people. I recommend *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie. Basically, seek first to understand and then be understood.
- Throw away your tobacco, processed food, and alcohol. Just throw them away.
- **Clean up your space.** Having a clean space is the first thing I do when my life gets out of hand. It's a reflection of your internal state. Do your laundry and throw out all of your trash. Get rid of things you haven't used in the last year and that you won't use in the next.
- **Clean yourself.** Hygiene, clip your nails, shave, floss and brush your teeth.
- **Cut your hair.** It's funny but when you cut your hair it's like a fresh start, a clean slate. Treat yourself to a nice haircut. We also value ourselves and we feel better when we look better. Maybe even change up your style.
- Block yourself from time wasting social media and video games or take a break. As amazing as the internet is it

can be very unhelpful when we are caught in negativity. I use [Freedom App](#) which works on my phone and computer. It's about \$40 for a whole year. It uses my IP to block sites so I can't just unblock whenever I want and you can put it on a schedule so you can limit use to only weekends or an hour a day.

- If you don't like where you live then move. Utilize all resources and silence any excuse you may have. If you can't move because of financial reasons then you can always ask close friends for some help with a transition. Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Take a vacation only if it makes sense and you can actually afford it. Getting away can be very cheap. Maybe you just need to go visit a friend or take a trip out of the city. If you live in the middle of nowhere then go to a city. The influence a new place can have is invaluable and impacts you more than you know.
- **Lighting and color.** Weird but consider changing your lights to daylight white for productivity and energy. Open your windows for fresh air, paint your walls a fun new color. Green, blue, and white are the most calming colors.
- **Give your room a makeover**, as simple as moving your bed or even just the side of your pillow. If you have space maybe change up where you do your activities. Buy a plant or some art.

Social Life

Many of us do not have the social life we want. It's a lot of work and often secondary to our careers and daily life. Our social setting affects us more than we realize. Here's some advice for improving ourselves socially.

- Put yourself in an environment where you have to be social. Many people take their work or organization for granted in this aspect. I've intentionally worked jobs in the service industry because I believe it's important to live life with others. Other environments that offer a social outlet include church, after school sports, farmers markets, and community events.
- Be very honest when you aren't happy with a relationship in your life. Not just a significant other but anyone who may be undermining your happiness.
- Life is all about boundaries. We suffer when we haven't decided on our boundaries either externally, with other people, or internally, living to our own standards. When it feels like we are getting stepped on or disrespected by another's behavior, it's time to draw a boundary. This requires confrontation but there is a way to be respectful while calmly, but firmly drawing a boundary. Define your own boundaries with others and yourself and be honest when they are crossed. You will become a person that you and others can respect.
- Put yourself out there. Go out and keep an open mind towards new people. They live other lives than you and some of the best experiences happen when you let a new person into your life.

Making It Permanent

A real fear we face is the worry of falling back into old behaviors. There are a few studied ways we can prevent this.

- **Learn about triggers and reward loops.** For any addictive behavior there is a trigger, the routine, and the reward. We can't actually change the trigger or the reward feelings but we can change the routines. In fact, we can't eliminate bad behaviors, we have to replace them. Start by determining what triggers your bad habit routines and start replacing them with good habit routines that result in healthy rewards. Create healthy triggers.
- Along the same vein there is an "If When, Then" method of handling a certain trigger. You simply write out statements that look like this: "If when I see someone offering out cookies, then I will grab a glass of water and say no."
- A lot of the changes we made in our environment can really help us stay healthy. Often the influence of large groups can make the difference. Choosing a positive group of people to spend time with is a good idea for long term change. Groups can provide a positive pressure and an expectation of you at your best.

Happiness

This is a big one but the answer is really fairly simple. You are responsible for your own happiness.

It's not that far away and if you've done all or most of these things happiness will come. When you try to be happy it evades you. For me it comes when I take right action, doing what I know I need to do.

Two philosophies have helped me become a happy person: Zen Buddhism and Stoicism.

Basically they both have an understanding that life just happens. We don't know why and it doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is if you accept it. That's it. Do you accept the fact that it's happening and ultimately that you have very little control of it?

It's not our fault but it is our individual responsibility to make it what we want. Both Zen and Stoicism teach us that life is ultimately suffering. Sure it's great and a lot of joy comes but alongside pain always.

In reality it's complete chaos. We are on a giant floating ball, flying through space, and we know very little and in the end we die. But it doesn't matter.

What matter is the way we live life and I believe life is about taking actions. We accept everything that happens as part of the whole story and we are just letting it play out.

The hardest parts of our lives are just cosmic events in motion. Toss out expectations. Toss out your entitlement to any certain way things happen. The reason to live life to its

fullest is simple: because we can.

Whether it's lived for the people around us, the greater good, or at the very least just to see what happens. It's crazy and sad, and fun and there is so much to do. Remain curious, find out the things that make you happy, and enjoy the hell out of them.

"The powerful play goes on so that you may contribute a verse."

- Tom Schulman

My Personal Example

Health

- Stop Drinking
- Stop Drinking for 30 days
- Drink Water
- Exercise More
- Make sure headphones are charged
- Run 4x per week (at least 3 miles)
- Prep Running gear after every run
- Lift 4x per week
- Prep Gym Bag every day
- Set a specific time to go
- Pick a simple lifting routine
- Sleep Consistently
- Bed at 12, wake at 8
- Set non phone alarm
- No eating 2 hrs before bed
- Don't schedule any work for after 9pm
- Eat Healthy
- Buy groceries: mixed greens, frozen veggies, protein, salad dressing
- When eating out drink water only and only order small plates

- No delivery, prep food for the week on Sunday
- Calculate TDEE
- Weigh yourself, determine caloric intake
- Take Daily Vitamins: D, Folic Acid, daily vitamin, Fish Oil, Omega 3, Zinc

Wealth

- Cancel all subscriptions: Netflix, Spotify, Audible, Prime
- Don't eat out
- If you have to order small items, drink only water
- Pay off credit card debt
- Pay as soon as a payday happens
- Call clients
- Compile all leads
- Work on website
- Look over copy, fix CTAs
- Pay Taxes

Social

- Go out Friday and Saturday
- Make plans with friends
- Call friends on Tuesday
- Put wedding dates in calendar

- Organize a beach day
- Schedule photo shoots

Environment

- Clean room
- Buy a new pillow
- Organize computer files
- Buy house supplies
- Visit somewhere new this weekend
- Throw out all alcohol and tobacco

Happiness

- Meditate 20 min per day
- Read 30 min every day
- Buy new shirts and shoes

Further Resources

All clickable links updated for 2026.

Crisis

- [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#). Call or text **988**. (Updated from 1-800-273-8255.)
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)

Reading List: Health

- *Starting Strength*, Mark Rippetoe
- *The UltraMind Solution*, Mark Hyman
- *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg
- *The 4-Hour Body*, Tim Ferriss
- [r/Fitness Getting Started Wiki](#)

Reading List: Wealth

- *Rich Dad Poor Dad*, Robert T. Kiyosaki
- *Money: Master the Game*, Tony Robbins
- *The Millionaire Next Door*, Thomas Stanley and William Danko
- *Think and Grow Rich*, Napoleon Hill
- *The Automatic Millionaire*, David Bach

Reading List: Success, Life, and Mindsets

- *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey

- *Awaken the Giant Within*, Tony Robbins
- *Ego Is the Enemy*, Ryan Holiday
- *The Obstacle Is the Way*, Ryan Holiday
- *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius
- *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle
- *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Roshi Philip Kapleau
- *The War of Art*, Steven Pressfield
- *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl
- *Unfu*k Yourself*, Gary John Bishop
- *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*, Mark Manson
- *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Chogyam Trungpa
- *Extreme Ownership*, Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

Reading List: Social

- *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie
- *How to Talk to Anyone*, Leil Lowndes
- *Start with No*, Jim Camp
- *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves

Tools

- [F.lux](#): free blue light filter for desktop.
- [Freedom App](#): site and app blocker. About \$40 a year.
- [sleep.me](#): Chilipad Dock Pro, the temperature-controlled bed pad. Roughly \$1,299 to \$1,499 in 2026.

- [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com): find local groups and activities.

What I'm Doing in 2026

The Comeback Manifesto gave you the framework. Stop the destructive behavior. Take responsibility. Write the action items. Sleep, eat, exercise, save money, clean the room, fix your social life. It is the right list. It has been the right list for seven years.

The thing the original guide does not solve is what you do on day three when you do not feel like it. Day one you are motivated. Day two you are still proving something. Day three the structure is gone, the calendar is empty, and nobody is watching. That is the day the streak breaks. That is the day I built FineStreak for.

Here is what FineStreak does:

You pick a habit from your action list. You set a fine, anywhere from \$5 to \$50. An AI agent calls you every day. You confirm whether you did the thing. Verification is built in: BAC photo, calorie screenshot, gym check-in, whatever proves the action happened. Miss the day, the fine is charged. Hit the streak, the fine drops over time as the discipline compounds.

It is not a habit tracker. It is not a journal. It is the consequence layer the 2019 Manifesto was missing.

The aphorism in this book is “motion creates emotion.” That is still true. Action still comes before the feeling. But action is hard to start when there is nothing on the line. A fine on the line is the smallest, cheapest forcing function I know.

If the framework in this book got you to the right plan,
FineStreak is how you make the plan hold.

finestreak.com

- *Brendan*

Contact

Questions, comments, and concerns are all appreciated.

Reach out at finestreak.com.

