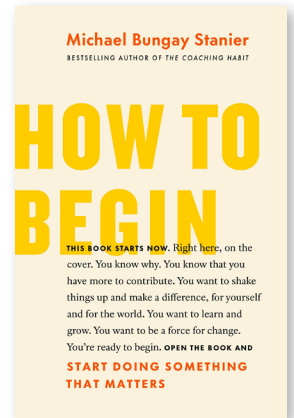


How to Begin

Start Doing Something That Matters

by **Michael Bungay Stanier**



Contents

Find Your Focus

Page 2

Test Your Ambition

Page 2

Claim Your Goal

Page 2

See Where You Stand

Page 3

Weigh Up the Status Quo

Page 3

Take Small Steps

Page 3

Remember Your Best Self

Page 3

Don't Travel Alone

Page 4

Conclusion

Page 4

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Are you ambitious, but feel you've never been given permission to seek out and discover what's possible for you, your life, and your career? Have you achieved some level of success but feel that you want to find that next level, and have begun thinking about the legacy you'll leave behind? Maybe you're unhappy with the state of the world and want to help be a force for good. Or maybe you simply want to be a force for good in the lives of your clients or customers.

If you're ready to 'begin'— whether for the first time or the tenth time— *How to Begin* is your guide to unlocking the best within you by doing work that truly matters. It's a practical guide to finding focus and courage as you set and pursue your Worthy Goal: a single, unifying vision and purpose that lights you up, compels you to grow, and serves a greater vision while challenging you outside your comfort zone. Overall, *How to Begin* is the key to avoiding regret in your life and career by starting today on something that matters, not tomorrow or the day after that.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to find and strengthen your Worthy Goal.
- How to become clear on your commitment so you know what you're facing.
- How to develop resources that will help you meet your goals without having to face challenges alone.
- How to build momentum, progress, and impact.

Find Your Focus

Worthy is a big word. It can feel a little.. earnest. Perhaps a little high and mighty. You might be thinking, “Who am I to be measuring things on a level of worthiness?” But “worthy” is less about an abstract moral rating and more about whether it’s worthy enough for you to be committing to it.

Worthy becomes more accessible as a standard when you understand its three different elements: Thrilling, Important, and Daunting. They’re the primary colours that allow you to paint the picture of your ambition. If you have all three of these in a goal or a project, you’ve got something intriguing on your hands.

The idea of taking this on gets you going. You’re excited about this, not just in theory but in real life. Thrilling means something to you. It speaks to your values and lights up your receptors. It makes you rub your hands together and think: “Yes! This!” You’d be proud to do this. It’s cool, fun, bold. It’s an adventure you want to have.

With Thrilling, Important, and Daunting established as the base, you’re ready to look for your Worthy Goal. Now, you may already have your Worthy Goal sketched out. You’ve just been waiting for a nudge and permission to get going. That’s great... and even though you might be tempted, don’t skip this section. The very worst thing that happens is you confirm you’ve totally nailed it. And a more likely outcome is you’ll refine your Worthy Goal and make it even more compelling for you.

The first draft is always crappy. The first time you write anything, it’s thoroughly mediocre. It’s tepid and confused. It’s overstuffed and underbaked. It’s too specific and too vague, all at once. The same is true when you begin to claim a Worthy Goal. But we have to start somewhere, and when we start with full permission to write a crappy first draft, it’s something.

Take your best shot at your Worthy Goal. Then go from there.

Test Your Ambition

You’ve taken a brave stab at your Worthy Goal with your crappy first draft. It might be tempting to stop now, because it’s already a big step forward to have something written down and declared. But don’t stop here.

Don’t. Stop. Here.

It’s time to strengthen and fine-tune your draft by test-

ing and triangulating this. Here are three tests to work through. You don’t have to “pass” all or indeed any of the tests. You’re just collecting feedback or information. But it’s useful to run your draft Worthy Goal through these tests to see what data you gather.

The Spouse-ish Test

Go tell your Spouse or other significant other (even a good friend) and clock their reaction. You don’t need to agree with everything they say, but their response will absolutely give you some insights.

The FOSO Test

Ask yourself ‘Why’ about your Worthy Goal, then create a reply that begins with ‘for the sake of...’ (or FOSO). If the answer is elusive, that could be telling you something.

The Goldilocks Zone Test

In the Goldilocks Zone test, you’re gauging the doability of your Worthy Goal. Is it too small and granular, or too abstractly aspirational? Does it have the ‘just right’ feel to it? Loading your Worthy Goal in the Goldilocks Zone is the way to ensure it has the right amount of ‘heft.’

Claim Your Goal

You’re about to give your worthy goal one final working-over to get it as close as possible to a final draft that is genuinely thrilling, important, and daunting. After a final edit, you’ll be ready to declare victory (or at least “Good Enough,” which is often the same thing).

Rate the current expression of your worthy goal on a scale of 1-7 in the categories of Thrilling, Important, and Daunting. If your total score is less than 18, your Worthy Goal may not yet be ready. There may not be specific science behind this, but when facilitating people through this process, this calibration is a key step towards getting closer to a truly powerful Worthy Goal.

The Voting Test helps you reset how you’re feeling about your worthy goal. It helps you step outside the subjective experience of wrestling with the details and gives you a more clinical (but still personal) reading against the three essential criteria.

No matter your score, the final challenge is to see if there’s just one word or short phrase that, if added, would tighten the power and focus of your Worthy Goal. This word could

represent the commitment, reach, time, scope, standard, or outcome of your Worthy Goal. Or it could be something else. Use this new word or phrase to tighten up your Worthy Goal into an effective final draft.

See Where You Stand

You have almost certainly declared an intention to do something that matters before, something that's in some way Thrilling, Important, and Daunting. It might have shown up, along with a glass of champagne, at midnight on December 31. It might have appeared at some other time, a moment when inspiration and ambition commingled. A tug on your sleeve, nudging you: Dream big. Dare bravely. Pursue boldly. Commit.

And commonly enough, not every time but likely the majority of times, you made little or no progress on it. You were becalmed, undone by some combination of: you didn't know where to start; you didn't know who to ask; you were denied access to resources and support; you made a few False Starts and lost heart; you were told you weren't the right person; you didn't trust the plan; you didn't master the skill immediately; you ran out of puff; you got distracted; you put it away "for now"; you were told to stop.

Don't do the usual and sweep these False Starts under the rug or conveniently "forget" about them. Instead, bring the stories out of the shadows and take a look. "Where," you can ask yourself, "have I seen something like this before?" Note all the versions and close relations to your Worthy Goal that you dabbled in or flirted with, versions that trailed off or never really got going; were shelved or put away in the drawer; were mocked or lost their mojo; were scaled down and then down again to nothing.

Acknowledge those times when you were disheartened, discouraged, discombobulated, distracted, and stuck.

Weigh Up the Status Quo

What if you choose not to answer the call? Imagine not taking on this Worthy Goal. Imagine if you let this opportunity slide past.

It can feel like a sign of weakness or a betrayal somehow to bring that possibility to the surface. But answering it is absolutely essential for progress. There are very tangible reasons -Prizes- for not taking on the Worthy Goal. We're far more committed to the status quo than we realize. Until you fully

understand this commitment, promises that run deep and are often unspoken and unrecognized, it's hard to shift that allegiance. Equally, there are very tangible consequences-Punishments-for stepping away from this opportunity.

Until you understand the cost to you and others for not taking on your Worthy Goal, you may never be pulled forward to commit.

Take the best three Prizes you get if you don't take on the Worthy Goal. List them below in the left-hand column. Then do the same for the Punishments, and list them in the right-hand column. Which way does the balance tip?

You can do this exercise in your head, or quite possibly the whole thing feels redundant--you just know the way things have played out. All of that's fine, so long as you've got a clear enough answer.

Take Small Steps

With small steps, you're doing two things. First, fueled by curiosity, you're collecting feedback. It's the only way you can make your way forward in a complex situation: keep checking where you are, try some things out, collect feedback, and decide what's next.

Second, you're mitigating risk so you don't end up plunging off a cliff or running into one or more of the three terrors of the Fire Swamp, thus prematurely ending your quest.

Jim Collins of *Good to Great* fame explains the process of figuring out strategy thus: fire bullets, then fire cannonballs. Even if you're not a fan of military metaphors, this is helpful. Collins explains that bullets are cheap and low-risk. Firing them is a manageable commitment, one that helps you figure out the real target. Once you've identified the target, then you can fully commit and fire the cannonball. Collins says that most people don't fire enough bullets and fire their cannonball way too soon; or they spend their life firing bullets without ever having the courage to load up the cannonball.

Remember Your Best Self

When you're across the threshold and on the journey, your feelings can swing back and forth between light and dark. There are times when every step feels assured, your confidence is unbounded, you're in the zone. Good times indeed.

Other times, doubt overwhelms you. Of course it does. You're on the edge of your own experience and compe-

tence. You're taking on something Thrilling and Important and Daunting. You've made a choice, which means saying yes and therefore also saying no.

You've decided not to dabble, not to keep your options open, but to commit.

In those moments of doubt, you'll be feeling some cocktail of confusion, anxiety, fear, heaviness, vulnerability, uncertainty, dread, guilt, and general dispiritedness.

That's all ok. That's normal. That's entirely expected and completely predictable. (Basically, don't make things worse by now beating yourself up for feeling that way. Perhaps throw your hands in the air and say, "How fascinating!")

How will you go on? By reconnecting to your Best Self.

Don't Travel Alone

It's been said that we're the sum of the five people we're closest to. Our weight, our wealth, our ambition...it's the average of their weight, wealth, ambition, and so on.

As with everything apocryphal, it's not totally true. What is true is that it's important to have good people around you, particularly when you're journeying into the future.

There isn't room for everyone. That's ok, because quite frankly, you'd be better off without some of your current companions. It's not only who travels with you on the journey, it's also about who you choose to leave behind.

Who in your life wants you to stay unchanging?

Who takes more than they give?

Who in your life sows seeds of doubt?

Who has betrayed you and may betray you again?

Whose idea of you is historical, rather than future facing?

Who stains you with the worst thing you've done, rather than reminds you of the best you can be?

Who triggers the worst in you, or at least the less than great?

Who contributes to you being numb?

Who contributes to you being afraid?

Who colludes with you not stepping towards the Thrilling, Important, and Daunting?

If someone checks too many of these boxes, it may be time to check them at the door to your Worthy Goal.

Conclusion

The time to start pursuing your Worthy Goal is today. The person to make it happen is you. The plan to make it happen is contained in this summary. Build your team, and get started.



Michael Bungay Stanier is at the forefront of shaping how organizations see coaching as an essential leadership competency. His book *The Coaching Habit* is the best-selling coaching book of this century, with over a million copies sold. In 2019, he was named the #1 thought leader in coaching, and he has spoken on coaching from Brené Brown's podcast to the TEDx stage. Michael founded Box of Crayons, a learning and development company that helps organizations transform from advice-driven to curiosity-led. He currently leads MBS.works, a place where people find the clarity, confidence and community to be a force for change.

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