

My 2019 Goals: Family, Fitness, Finance, and Fun

Small habits don't add up, they compound. You don't need to be twice as good to get twice the results. You just need to be slightly better. — [James Clear](#)

Not too long ago I used to set a monster list of goals. Over time I realized two things during my annual reflections: 1. I was putting things down on my goal list that I was already going to do anyway because it was automatic based on my habits; and 2. that 10 to 20 goals were way too much to accomplish anything meaningful. In November I finished listening to [Atomic Habits](#) and had another realization about goal setting. My big takeaway from that book was that it was the system (the habits that lead to progress toward a goal) that mattered more than the goal itself. The author, James Clear, argues that it far more important to focus on the system (habits) than on the outcome (goals). [Here is an excerpt from the book](#) (it's much longer than what I'm quoting here but you can read the full excerpt by clicking the link - **emphasis is mine**):

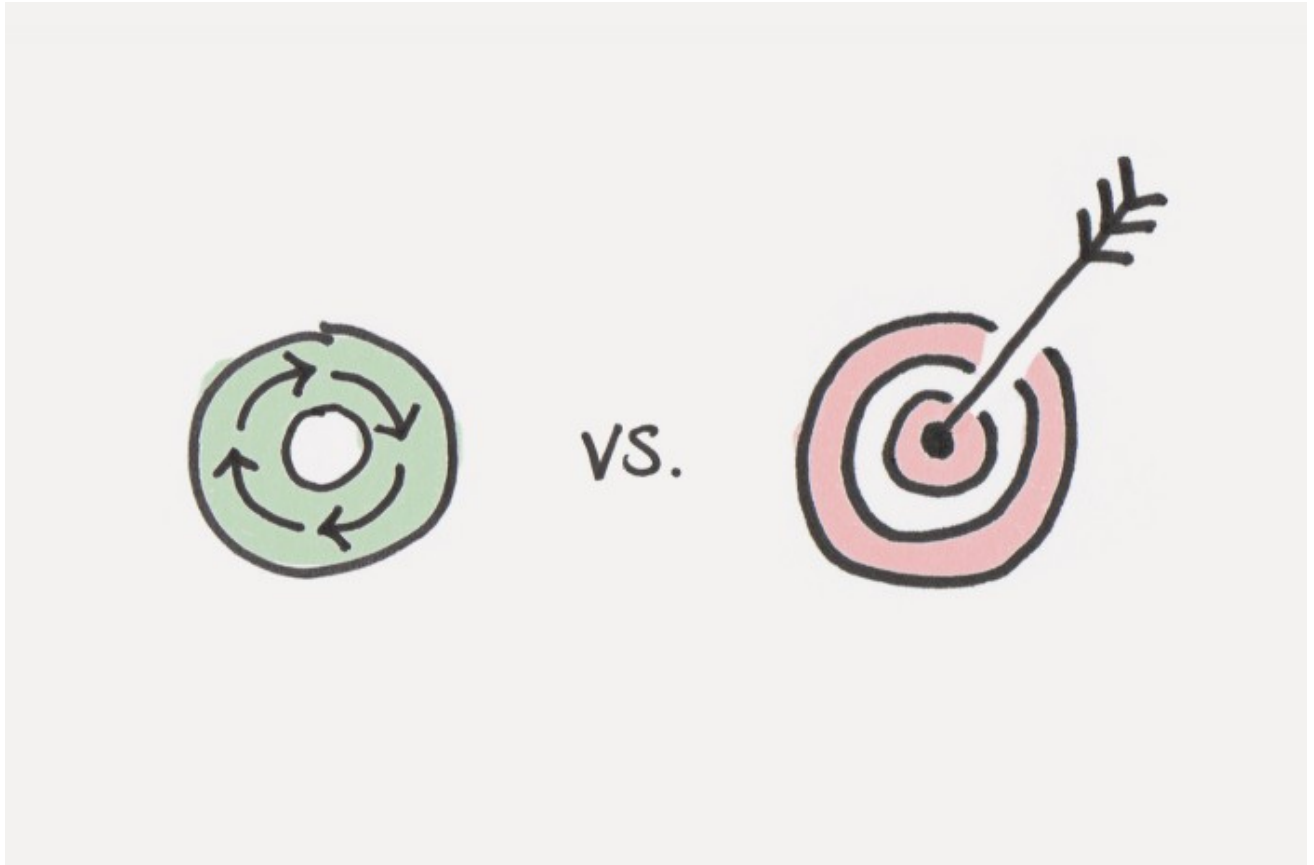
Prevailing wisdom claims that the best way to achieve what we want in life—getting into better shape, building a successful business, relaxing more and worrying less, spending more time with friends and family—is to set specific, actionable goals.

*For many years, this was how I approached my habits, too. Each one was a goal to be reached. I set goals for the grades I wanted to get in school, for the weights I wanted to lift in the gym, for the profits I wanted to earn in business. I succeeded at a few, but I failed at a lot of them. Eventually, **I began to realize that my results had very little to do with the goals I set and nearly everything to do with the systems I followed.***

- If you're a coach, your goal might be to win a championship. Your system is the way you recruit players, manage your assistant coaches, and conduct practice.*
- If you're an entrepreneur, your goal might be to build a million-dollar business. Your system is how you test product ideas, hire employees, and run marketing campaigns.*
- If you're a musician, your goal might be to play a new piece. Your system is how often you practice, how you break down and tackle difficult measures,*

and your method for receiving feedback from your instructor.

- Forget about setting goals, focus on your systems instead.



Now for the interesting question: if you completely ignored your goals and focused only on your system, would you still succeed? For example, if you were a basketball coach and you ignored your goal to win a championship and focused only on what your team does at practice each day, would you still get results?

I think you would.

The goal in any sport is to finish with the best score, but it would be ridiculous to spend the whole game staring at the scoreboard. The only way to actually win is to get better each day. In the words of three-time Super Bowl winner Bill Walsh, "The score takes care of itself." The same is true for other areas of life. If you want better results, then forget about setting goals. Focus on your system instead.

What do I mean by this? Are goals completely useless? Of course not. Goals are good for setting a direction, but systems are best for making progress. A handful of problems arise when you spend too much time thinking about your goals and not enough time designing your systems.

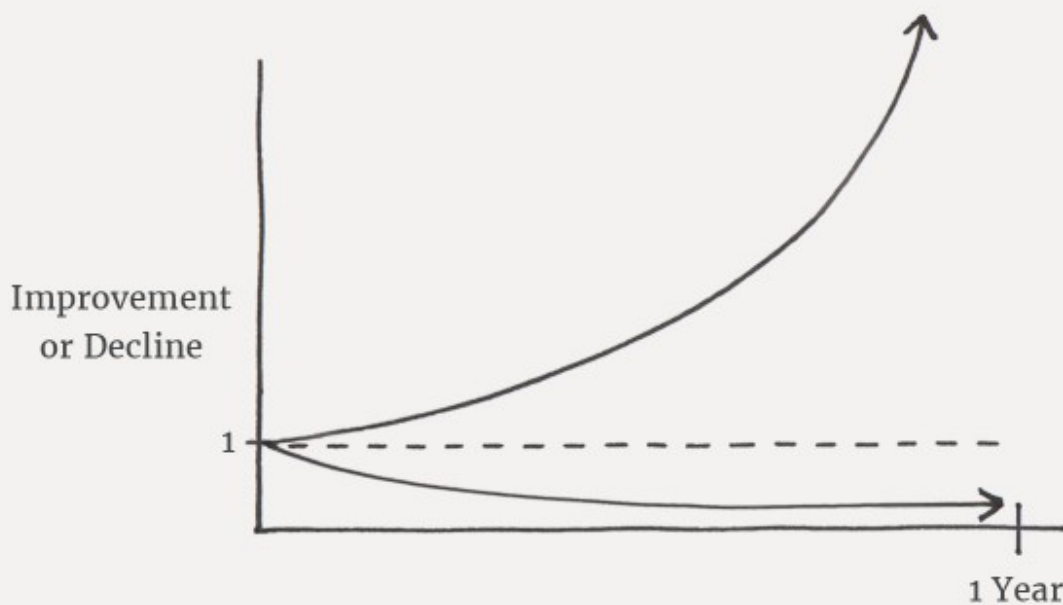
*None of this is to say that goals are useless. However, I've found that **goals are good for planning your progress** and **systems are good for actually making progress**.*

Goals can provide direction and even push you forward in the short-term, but eventually a well-designed system will always win. Having a system is what matters. Committing to the process is what makes the difference.

Some people like Patrick O'Shaughnessy take this philosophy to an extreme and don't set goals at all. Instead he practices what he calls "[growth without goals](#)." Idealistically I like the idea of this, but in practice, I don't think this would work for me. I personally need a few goals to set a direction, like Clear said in the last paragraph of the excerpt above. That being said, I am a big believer in continuous improvement, which is ultimately what O'Shaughnessy is pursuing. James Clear actually has [a great post](#) on this idea of continuous improvement and his visual does an outstanding job in showing the power of your good habits compounding over time.

The Power of Tiny Gains

$$\begin{array}{l} 1\% \text{ better every day} \quad 1.01^{365} = 37.78 \\ 1\% \text{ worse every day} \quad 0.99^{365} = 0.03 \end{array}$$



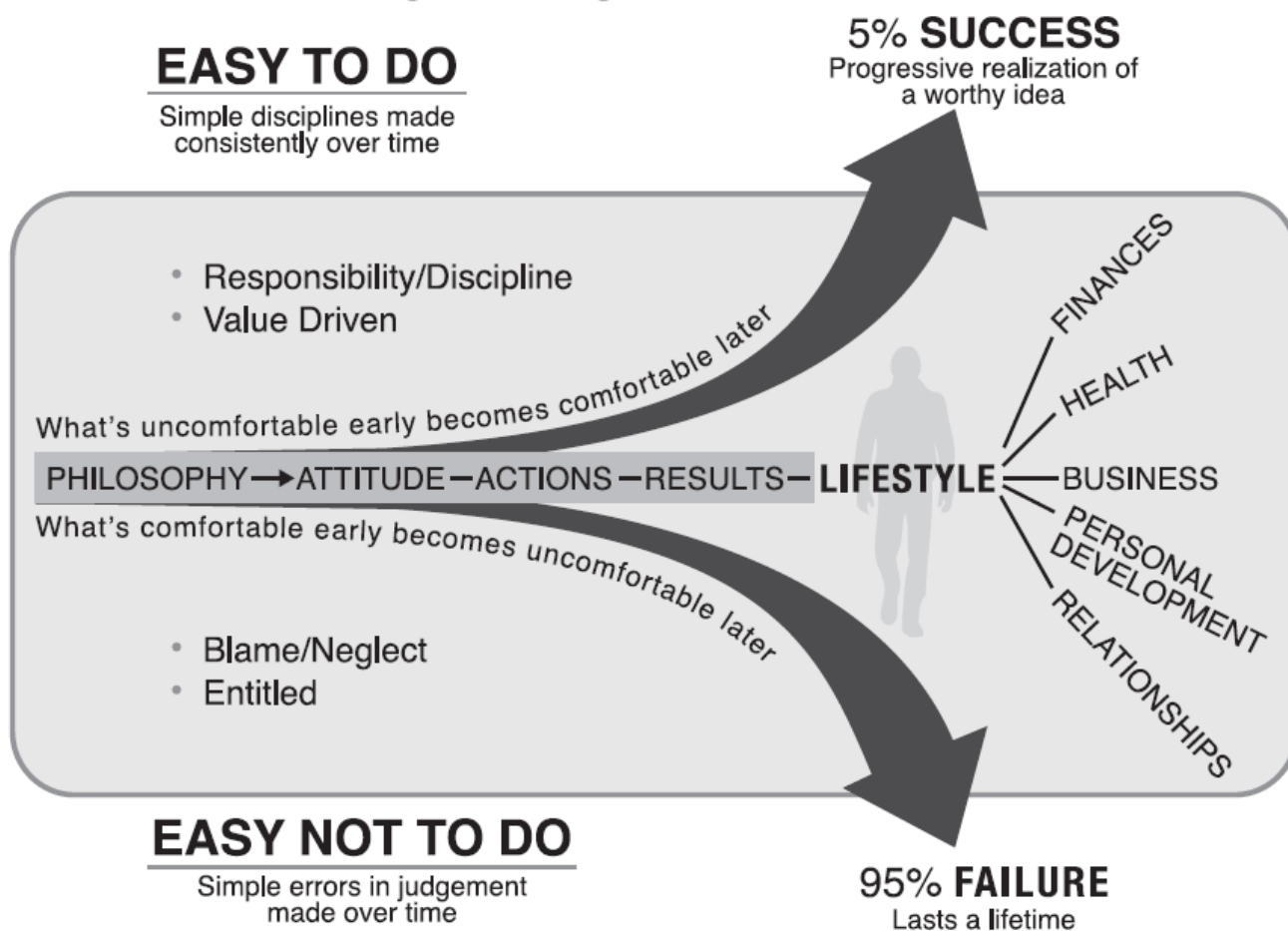
JamesClear.com

It's interesting to note that getting 1% worse every day for a year is hardly noticeable, and that in the beginning, there isn't much of a noticeable difference between getting 1% better or 1% worse. Then, all of a sudden improvements begin to compound and after improving 1% every day for one year you end up almost 38 times better by the time the year is up.

None of this is new to me, as this is all very much in line with the philosophy of [The](#)

[Slight Edge](#)^x. You will even notice from the image below that the graphics tell a similar story. However, Clear and O’Shaughnessy have added additional perspective to help me refine my own thinking and process. So this year I’m going to set goals and then I will focus more on the system of habits to achieve those goals than the goals themselves.

Slight Edge Life Paths



I love how clear and effective the last two graphics convey how good habits compounded over time create a huge gap between the 5% that succeed and the 95% that fail due to bad habits.

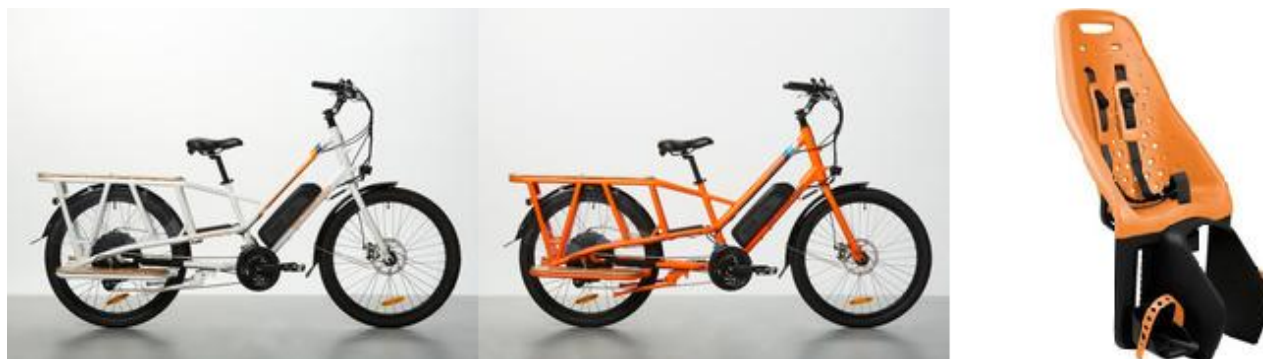
My 2019 Goals

Family - Get the GYFG family electric bikes to start a new tradition of weekly bike rides.

Purchase two [Rad Wagon bikes](#) with child seat attachment (see below). I first came across these bikes when I was looking for alternative transportation for

my brother earlier this year. I bought him the commuter version and it was perfect to get him to and from work or really anywhere else he needed to be. These bikes have a 25-45 mile radius on a single charge.

I've chosen the Rad Wagon bikes because they are more of an all-purpose bike and will make it easy to bring baby GYFG along with the baby seat accessory (pictured below). These bikes also make it convenient for traveling with cargo loads of up to 120 lbs on the rear rack. This means we could go to the grocery store and load up some cargo bags (sold separately, of course) for easy storage and travel home. If we have a second kid, the rear rack is actually large enough for two child seats on one bike.



We have talked about getting bikes for a while. Plus, I have wanted to bike the five miles to work for a long time as another way to inject activity into my daily routine and counteract the impact of a sedentary desk job. I can also see us getting the attachment for the car in order to transport these bad boys to the beach or camping. This is really going to be a great family purchase that will encourage activity as a family, and for me personally. I love that I'm able to set a family goal that is also aligned with my own fitness goal.

These aren't cheap bikes but as I type this we are two days away from their Cyber Monday deal. If I were to buy these bikes with the child seat today, it would put us back about \$3,800, but if I wait two days (which I will obviously do), the bikes will be discounted by \$400 each, and then there is another \$200 savings when buying two or more bikes. I really think \$2,800 is a great deal for these bikes. This is going to be my present from "Santa" to the GYFG family. Can't wait!!!

Action: Purchase the bikes (this will be done 11/26).

System (Habit): Weekly bike rides with the family. I'm thinking Saturdays and Sundays will be best for this, but Mrs. GYFG and I will decide as a team.

Fitness - Achieve a more aesthetic physique by losing 9% in body fat and maintaining that (starting at ~19% per my [Withings Smart Scale](#)).

In my [mid-year goal check](#), I mentioned how I had not made as much progress

as I had wanted to on my fitness goal this year. Let me provide a little more context. I hurt my back in March of 2016 during a Crossfit exercise, when I went too heavy (due to ego), fatigue led to poor form, and that eventually led to two bulging discs (confirmed almost two years later). I stopped doing Crossfit and really all activity for a few months to let the injury heal. I started to feel better and even started working out again, but my back always felt "off."

24 sessions of chiropractic adjustments didn't help and in fact actually made things worse. Unfortunately, the first chiropractors (a two-brother team) I sought out ended up providing "turn and burn" care of maybe two minutes with me each visit, and although I tried to give them as much feedback as I could to help them guide me through my recovery, it didn't work and I moved on.

I had accepted that my back would always be a little off but that I could work through the discomfort. In 2017, I started running again and ramped up my weight lifting sessions. Then one morning in late 2017 I woke up with shooting pain going down my right leg, and it was very uncomfortable to walk. I assumed it was a minor "tweak," and that I just needed to take it easy for a few days to let everything get back to normal. Boy, was I wrong!

My back got a lot worse before it got better. All my travel sitting in planes and cars didn't help things either. I hit rock bottom in January of 2018 while on vacation up in Lake Tahoe. There were two days where I literally lay on the couch with my legs hanging over the edge to relieve the pain and pressure on what I now know was nerve impingement from a bulging disc. I was disappointed that I couldn't even ski or snowboard because I was in such bad shape. It didn't help that I had put on an extra 25 lbs since the injury, due to a much less active lifestyle.

Determined to fix my back without surgery I found a new chiropractor who had a decompression program in Orange County using a machine called the DRX 9000. He was fairly confident that if I went through his eight-week decompression program and did what he said, that my back would recover without surgery. Thankfully, that proved true, and while I've spent most of 2018 rehabbing my back through decompression and swimming, I am happy to report that I feel like I'm 98% healed and continuing to make progress each and every day.

I know that was a long-winded story and build up to get to the punch line, which is that I did not hit my goal in 2018, but that I'm doubling down in 2019 with a better plan and more able body. I've spent a lot of time thinking through the habits and actions I need to take to ensure I accomplish my goal this year. The good news is that I already have a pre-paid gym membership to LA Fitness that

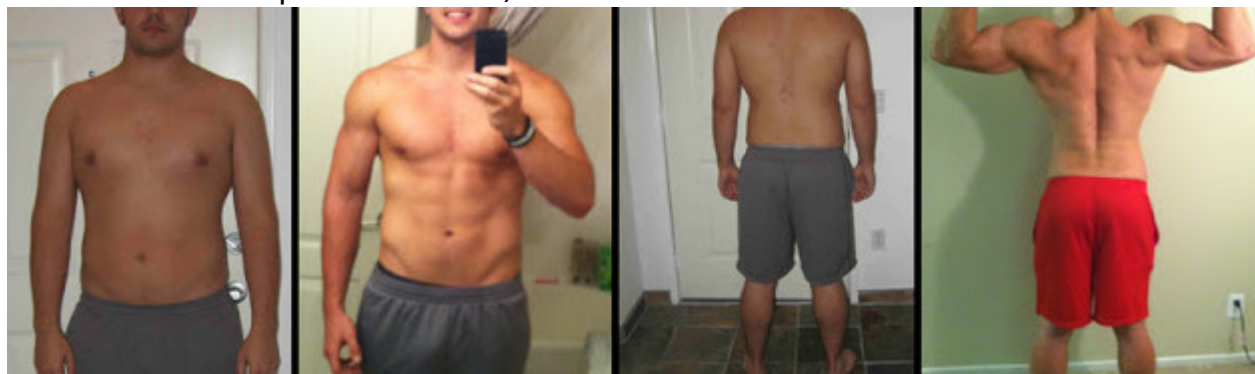
is good through April of 2021. I also have a home gym in the garage and many at-home workout programs like [P90X](#) and [Insanity](#).

I have intermittently considered myself to be a fitness fanatic, something I haven't lived up to these past couple years, but I'm ready to get back into "fighting shape" and then maintain the healthy habits that will get me there.

Action: Develop a weekly workout schedule. The weekly routine should include (sensible) weight training, swimming, yoga, walking, and biking to work (see family goal above).

System (Habits): 1. Work out 5-6 days per week. 2. [Intermittent Fasting with 16/8 protocol](#). 3. Follow 80/20 rule and eliminate processed carbs from my diet (perfection is not the goal).

The three habits I have outlined above are habits that have served me well in the past. This isn't my first rodeo. Back in 2011, I found myself in a similar situation and by following the above habits I was able to drop my weight from 240 lbs to 200 lbs and my body fat from 28% to 9% over a 250 day period (see before and after photo's below).



I'm looking to get back to the 2nd and 4th photos above. But this time I am setting the goal to both get there and maintain it. The good news is that instead of starting at 28% body fat, this time I'm starting at 19% and working my way down to 10%.

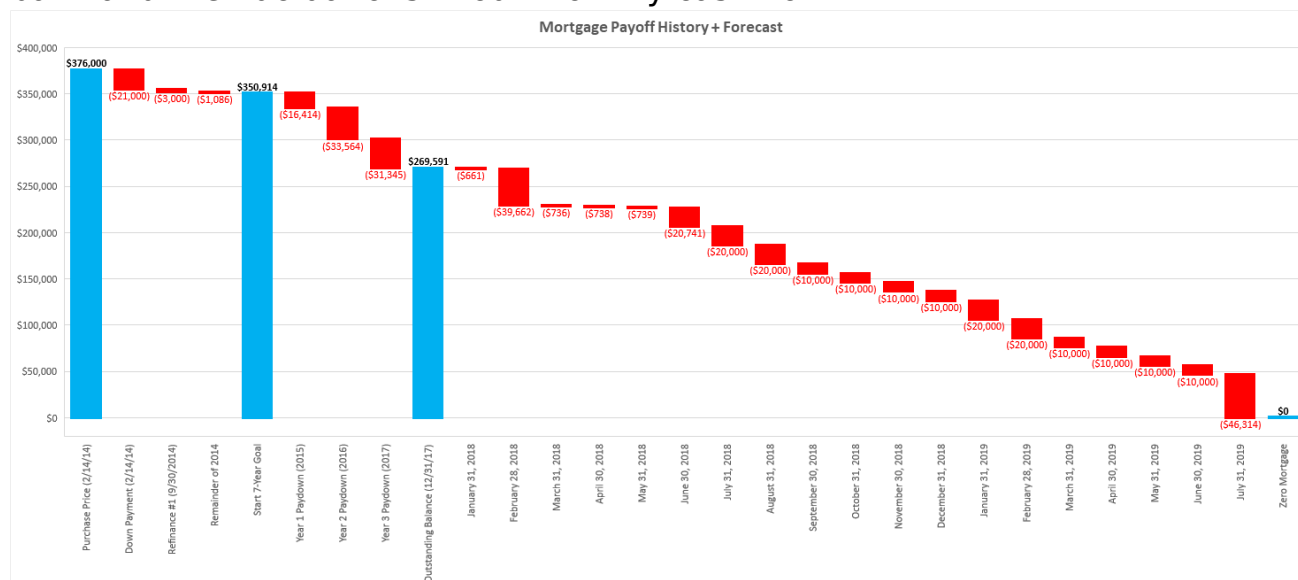
This post is already getting long so I will have to dedicate a future post to walk you through the details of the system that will allow me to not only achieve my desired outcome but maintain it over the long term (I'm currently working on my 20-year health and fitness plan).

Finance - Pay off the mortgage by 7/31/19 (remaining balance of \$125,000 - **update before being published**)

This is going to be the least financially-focused year of "goals" in recent history. It's not because my financial goals have become any less important but because the habits have been formed and are now operating on autopilot. We don't have

to think about [saving 50% of our after-tax income](#) for it to happen anymore. We don't have to think about maxing out our 401Ks because that is automated. We don't have to think about finding ways to increase our income because it is something we do without thinking about it.

But being that this is a finance blog and all, I had to have one goal that was finance-related. [We have already laid out our plan to be mortgage free by July of 2019](#) and now we just have to execute on that plan. This takes a bit more active management because I have to manage to maintain a certain balance in the bank and the fluctuations in our monthly cash flow.



Visualization of our plan.

As I type this (11/24/28) we have followed the plan to a "T" through November. As long as we stick to the plan we will only have about \$125K left to pay down over the first seven months of 2019. We have a special bottle of champagne waiting for us in our wine fridge to celebrate our last payment. We also plan to have a private mortgage burning party with said champagne and some fancy caviar (something we have been saving to try for this occasion).

Action: Create Payment Schedule (already done)

System (Habit): Make the additional mortgage payments [per the schedule](#).

Fun - Read [Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat: Mastering the Elements of Good Cooking](#) and choose one recipe per quarter to prepare for family and friends.

I really enjoy both food and cooking. I especially enjoy preparing meals for friends and family. My most recent obsession has been paella and that will be my go-to dish through the end of 2018, but I want to add a few more to my repertoire. In years past, I have added the following specialties to my culinary

bag of tricks: White Pesto Ground Turkey Lasagna, 13-hour Slow-Cooked Brisket, Beer Can Chicken, Spicy Chicken Chipotle Pasta, The Perfect Rib Eye Steak (grilled on pan-fried), and others.

I haven't done nearly as much cooking as I would have liked to the past few years, so this is me making an active effort to revitalize an activity that brings me so much joy.



Concluding Thoughts

I'm very excited about 2019. That said, we're not quite done with 2018, so I still need to focus on finishing this year strong. I do have a little secret to share with you, though. I always set my goals during Thanksgiving week because it gives me a month's head start - meaning I actually get 13 months to work on my goals rather than 12.

I love how this year everything is really geared around family and fitness. The finance goal is all about solidifying our financial foundation to ensure our family always has a roof over our head and there is no debt that can threaten that

regardless of what the future brings. The fun goal is all about bringing joy to my family (and friends) through delicious food.

Your turn! *What are your goals for 2019? Do you need to take a step back to focus more on the daily habits needed to achieve your goal, rather than the goal itself? Have you found yourself setting too many goals in the past? Maybe it's time to set no more than three - five for 2019.*

Onward & Upward!

- Gen Y Finance Guy



Gen Y Finance Guy

Hey, I'm Dom - the man behind the cartoon. You'll notice that I sign off as "Gen Y Finance Guy" on all my posts, due to the fact that I write this blog anonymously (at least for now). I like to think of myself as the *Chief Freedom Officer* here of my little corner of the internet. In the real world, I'm a 30-something former C-Suite executive turned entrepreneur turned capital allocator. I am trying to humanize finance by sharing my own journey to Financial Freedom. I believe in total *honesty* and *transparency*. That is why before I ever started blogging, I decided that I would share all of my own [financial stats](#). I do this not to brag, but instead to inspire motivate, and also to hold myself accountable. My goal is to be a beacon of hope, motivation, and inspiration for *you*, the reader, by living life by example and sharing it **all** here on the blog. My sincere hope is that you will be able to learn from me - both from my successes and my failures! [Read More](#)