

# Beat the Bully



How to overcome the  
“You’ll always be this way” voice  
when you try to change

Howard Jacobson, PhD  
[PlantYourself.com](http://PlantYourself.com)

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For more information, please write to:

Howard Jacobson  
Plant Yourself  
Email: [hj@plantyourself.com](mailto:hj@plantyourself.com)

Published in beautiful North Carolina, where the sun never bullies the moon.

*No bullies were actually beaten during the making of this report.*

We often want to change our habits and behaviors so we can get different results.

We want to eat differently to lose weight and get healthy.

We want to exercise daily and exert appropriately to get fit and feel good in our bodies.

We want to start a meditation practice to feel powerful and peaceful in our minds.

And yet we don't seem to make changes, or we make changes and can't maintain them.

And after that goes on for a while (like, all our lives), we start feeling defeated even before we begin.

### **“Now’s the Time”**

You know that “now’s the time” feeling you sometimes get when you get in touch with a powerful motivation?

Maybe you get excited about a self-help book, program or method.

Maybe you get scared by the number on the scale or the results of a blood test or the warning tone in the doctor's voice.

Maybe you think about the future and say to yourself, “This stops now.”

You commit to making the change, this time, finally, for real, for keeps.

And then the voice in our head mocks you:

*“Come on, you've failed every time you've tried. Why should this time be any different? You'll always be this way. Just give up and get used to it.”*

You feel deflated, despairing, and disempowered before you even begin.

And the change effort quickly falters and becomes another case of self-fulfilling prophesy.

Can you overcome the inner voice that predicts future failure based on past failures? Or are you doomed to keep your old ways and limiting habits until you die?

### **How to Change the Script**

Here are four simple ways to change the script that determines what you will and won't do.

I've kept them simple on purpose. While it's often useful and meaningful work to dive deep into our past and the inner workings of our minds, it's not necessary for rewriting the script.

And one of the ways we keep ourselves stuck is by believing that we have to achieve deep change in order to manifest external change.

In fact, the reverse is usually truer - we have to change our surface thoughts and actions before we trust ourselves enough to go deep.

Ready to get started?

## 1. Meet the Bully

The voice that tells us we can't change gets all its power from a simple mistake: we think that voice is us.

We hear thoughts in our head and assume that they're our thoughts. And then because we think they're our thoughts, we believe them.

When you think about it, that's pretty bizarre. As meditation teacher Adyashanti of [Adyashanti.org](http://Adyashanti.org) points out, we don't necessarily believe the voices in other people's heads, so why should we automatically believe our own?

My friend and teacher Brian Stokes of Pathwork of NC (at [Facebook.com/pathworknc](https://www.facebook.com/pathworknc)) calls this voice "the Bully." When I learned this concept from him, it helped me immensely. It was no longer about my own dysfunctional thought patterns, but a bully inside my head trying to keep me down.

The space created by personifying the voice - by naming it the Bully - allowed me to hear it without believing it.

Now it only regains power through ventriloquism - by fooling me into thinking it's me. And that trick works less and less reliably and less and less often, as I catch it in the act again and again.

Once I believe in the Bully's existence, I can separate myself from its ("his," in my case) agenda. I can look at the Bully's goals and see if I agree with them.

### **What are the Bully's goals?**

To wit: the bully doesn't want me to change for the better. How do I know this? By observing the effects of the Bully's words on me. When I believe the Bully, I don't commit wholeheartedly. I don't follow through. I don't seek accountability partners. I don't change my environment to support the change I want to make.

I can also think about what my goals would be if I talked like that to someone else, let's say to my son. "You'll never become a professional musician- the odds are a million to one against. Why bother practicing?"

Regardless of whatever twisted pathology would motivate me to speak like that, and regardless of my awareness of my own motivations (I was never encouraged as a child, I'm jealous, I don't want to see him hurt, etc.), the GOAL of such talk would be to stamp out my son's ambition and willingness to work toward his cherished goals.

### **Do you concur?**

So now that I've identified the Bully's primary goal - to keep me from changing for the better - I can decide: "Do I agree with this goal or not? Am I in alignment with the Bully?"

At this point, the answer is obvious: "Hell, no!"

I wouldn't spend any more time than necessary in the company of another person who talked to me that way. And I sure wouldn't hire that person to be my coach, trainer, or manager. So fire that Bully's ass!

Tell the Bully: *"I'm in charge here. You don't get what you want any more."*

And when the Bully says, "That's what you thought the last time," you reply: *"Nice try."*

Because when you figure out the Bully's game, the Bully loses all power.

## **2. Collect Counter-examples**

You can beat the Bully simply by following the above step. But it can be hard to do that consistently if you yourself have started believing the Bully's central claim: you always quit or screw up, so this next time will be the same.

It's time to argue with yourself, preferably out of earshot of the Bully. Look for counter-examples. You'll start seeing them everywhere.

For example, can you do any of the following:

- ✓read
- ✓write
- ✓tie your shoes
- ✓drive a car (sorry, New Yorkers ;)
- ✓use email
- ✓download a PDF to your hard drive
- ✓brush your teeth
- ✓refrain from crying whenever you are tired, hungry, or wet

If so, congratulations! Because you weren't born with any of those abilities. You grew and developed and changed until you were able to do things you hadn't done before.

And I'll bet if you devote 3 minutes to adding to that list, you'll come up with dozens if not hundreds of things you had to grow and change in order to accomplish.

Keep that list in the back pocket of your mind when the Bully starts squawking, or when you start agreeing with the Bully's assessment. And remind yourself how full of BS that Bully really is.

Because the fact that there are still a few important skills and behavior and habits you haven't yet mastered doesn't in any way take away from the overwhelming trend: you are a growth and development and change machine!

### 3. Retire all your inner authority figures

My friend and mentor Peter Bregman of [PeterBregman.com](http://PeterBregman.com) points out that we change all the time, throughout our lives. And often without fanfare or difficulty or even much effort.

It's not change we resist, Peter says, but being changed. If your new healthy habits and behaviors aren't sticking, chances are you're acting as if you "should" change. Like there's some external authority telling you what to do. And that kicks up resistance in a big way.

So guess what? There's no external authority telling you what to do about your health. If someone's nagging you and you listen to them, that's your choice to give away your power.

Take it back.

Change for no one but yourself.

Reject authority, even the voice of authority that you've introjected (another word I use to impress; it basically means "taken in as your own").

And reconnect with what feels right and good and kind and loving to yourself.

After all, I bet you don't need to motivate yourself to eat your favorite food.

Or to go to sleep when you're tired.

Or to watch your favorite TV show or listen to your favorite radio program or podcast.

So what's the difference between those behaviors and the ones you have to "force" yourself to do?

You do them because you want to, not because someone told you to.

But... but... but...

You might be thinking, aren't you putting the cart before the horse here? (Or, less metaphorically, "Are you out of your freaking mind?")

After all, you engage in those behaviors effortlessly because you enjoy them. How can I advise you to simply “enjoy” activities you currently hate, like jogging or working out or laying off the potato chips and Twix bars?

It’s not quite so simple. In [Punished by Rewards](#), Alfie Cohn shares dozens of examples of how external rewards can pollute internal motivation. Like a group of school children who were rewarded for playing their favorite game - after a while, they didn’t want to play it anymore.

When you do any activity because of external pressure, you diminish your inner desire to do it.

And, conversely (a fancy word that I think means “wearing hipster sneakers”), when you perform a behavior because you choose it (even if you’d rather be laying on the couch watching reruns of *Jersey Shore*), you begin to enjoy how it makes you feel.

## 4. Lower the bar

There’s a concept in psychology called “self-efficacy,” which is another word I use when I’m trying to impress people. It basically means self-confidence. But not in a global “I’m awesome” sense, but in relation to a specific future task or challenge.

Like, I may have the world’s lowest self-esteem, but I’m still certain that I can walk into the kitchen and pour myself a glass of water. So my auto-hydration (a word I’ve never used until just now) self-efficacy is 100%.

In studies, self-efficacy has been shown to be the single biggest predictor of behavior, given sufficient motivation. The motivation is important: Just because I can also go into the kitchen and pour myself a glass of white vinegar doesn’t mean I’m likely to do it. But if it’s something I want to do and I fully believe I can do it, then I most probably will.

So we can use that self-efficacy thing to our advantage when we begin a change that we’ve gotten used to believing is beyond our capability. By lowering the bar so that we’re 100% we can accomplish the goal.

### **Make micro-changes**

My friend and teacher Lani Muelrath of [LaniMuelrath.com](#) teaches her clients to use this strategy, which she calls “micro-changes.” Let’s say you want to start a running habit. You’ve tried a bunch of times to get up in the morning and go running, but you always give up after a few days. So now you’ve got this story that you’re a failure at running, and exercise, and weight control, and hey, what the hell, life itself. (That Bully is nothing if not creative.)

Lani’s recommended micro-change (the first in a series of several in an example detailed in her book [The Plant-Based Journey: A Step-by-Step Guide to Transition to a Healthy Lifestyle and Achieve Your Ideal Weight](#)) is to put your running shoes by the front door. Can you do that? Hell, yeah!

Congratulations. I bet you didn't keep them there before. You've made a change, a real change, a significant change!

Because after a couple of weeks of this smashing success, you're going to commit to putting your feet in those shoes in the morning.

You don't even have to lace them. You certainly don't have to go running in them. Just play "hide the piggies" for a minute, and then go about your day. (I'm not sure if Lani is this granular about it, but I'm on a roll.)

A couple of weeks later, lace them up.

Then, a couple of weeks later, go for a walk to the end of the driveway and back. Then for a whole minute. Then five minutes. Then 15. Then 30. Then jog.

You get the idea.

The time frame doesn't matter at all. What matters is you take each additional step when you're 100% confident you can do it. No matter how busy or tired or stressed or forgetful you are, you're gonna do it.

Like I brush my teeth before bed, every day. Because I feel unspeakable gross going to bed with unbrushed teeth. So even if I've had the most exhausting day, I'm 100% confident that I will brush before I go to sleep. And that confidence also comes from buying tooth brushes and tooth paste in bulk, and keeping track of inventory so I never run out.

### **Give yourself a promotion**

Every time you master a micro-change, it's like you've just given yourself a promotion. If you look at it right (as in, the way I'm telling you to right now!), you're slowly but surely proven your own reliability to yourself.

You're amassing an air-tight case that you are a person capable of making and maintaining positive changes in your life.

### **Beat the Bully!**

Follow these four simple steps, and pretty soon your Bully will be reduced to an occasional, laughable, puny whine in your ear while you go about your business of becoming a better and better version of yourself.

Be well!

### **Did you find this report helpful?**

I hope so; I deliberately kept it basic and actionable.



If you're looking for support, guidance, and possibly some coaching in improving your diet and lifestyle to improve your current health and future prospects, give me a shout at [hj@plantyourself.com](mailto:hj@plantyourself.com).

## Share the Love

Can you think of three friends who would benefit from this report? Send them to [PlantYourself.com/bully](http://PlantYourself.com/bully) to get their own copy.



Be healthy on purpose.

Be well.

And send me a postcard of you kicking sand in your bully's face!

Peace,  
Howard