

Unit 1 MATT CUTTS

Try Something New for 30 Days

A few years ago I felt like I was stuck in a rut so I decided to **follow in the footsteps**¹ of the **great American philosopher, Morgan Spurlock**², and try something new for 30 days. The idea is actually pretty simple. Think about something you've always wanted to add to your life, and try it for the next 30 days. **It turns out**³, 30 days is just about the right amount of time to add a new habit or subtract a habit—like watching the news—from your life.

There's a few things I learned while doing these 30-day challenges. The first was, instead of the **months flying by**⁴, forgotten, the time was much more memorable. This was part of a challenge I did to take a picture every day for a month. And I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing that day. I also noticed that as I started to do more and harder 30-day challenges, my self-confidence grew. I went from **desk-dwelling computer nerd**⁵ to the kind of guy who bikes to work—for fun. Even last year, I ended up hiking

up Mt. Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa. I would never have been that adventurous before I started my 30-day challenges.

I also figured out that if you really want something badly enough, you can do anything for 30 days. Have you ever wanted to write a novel? Every November, tens of thousands of people try to write their own 50,000-word novel **from scratch**⁶ in 30 days. It turns out, all you have to do is write 1,667 words a day for a month. So I did. By the way, **the secret is**⁷ not to go to sleep until you've written your words for the day. You might be sleep deprived, but you'll finish your novel. Now, is my book the next great American novel? No. I wrote it in a month. It's awful. But for the rest of my life, if I meet **John Hodgman**⁸ at a TED party, I don't have to say, "I'm a computer scientist." No, no. If I want to, I can say, "I'm a novelist."

¹ To "follow in the footsteps" of someone means to do what they do.

² Morgan Spurlock is not known as a philosopher, but Cutts refers to him in this way as a form of compliment.

³ The phrase "It turns out" is used before sharing a result, often a surprising or unexpected one: *It turns out I got the highest score in the class!*

⁴ If "time flies by," it passes very quickly.

⁵ The term "computer nerd" is commonly used to describe someone who loves computers and spends a lot of time using them. Cutts adds "desk-dwelling" to show us that he wasn't a very active person before starting his project. The term "nerd" can sometimes be negatively used to describe someone lacking social skills.

⁶ The phrase "from scratch" means to create something from raw materials. It is commonly used in cooking to explain something that is homemade, but it can be used to describe any kind of project that was started from the beginning with no help from pre-made items.

⁷ The word "secret" is often used as Cutts uses it here to refer to a key to success. It is a piece of information that will help a person reach success in a certain situation.

⁸ John Hodgman is an American author and humorist who has given two TED talks.

So here's⁹ one last thing I'd like to mention. I learned that when I made small, sustainable changes, things I could keep doing, they were more likely **to stick**¹⁰. There's nothing wrong with big, crazy challenges. In fact, they're **a ton of fun**¹¹. But they're less likely to stick. When I gave up sugar for 30 days, day 31 looked like this.

So here's my question to you: What are you waiting for? **I guarantee you the next 30 days are going to pass whether you like it or not**¹², so why not think about something you have always wanted to try, and give it a shot for the next 30 days.

Thanks.

⁹ Cutts uses this phrase twice toward the end of his talk as a way of signposting important points.

¹⁰ When something “sticks,” it becomes a habit.

¹¹ The phrase “a ton of fun” is a colloquial way to say “a lot of fun,” and it refers to having greatly enjoyed something.

¹² Cutts's point here is that the passing of time is inevitable, and so we should make the most of it.