



JUST START

THE FIRST STEP
IS EVERYTHING

← c'mon.
start
anyway.

MICHAEL PEARSON-ADAMS

JUST START

Companion Workbook

Second Edition · Michael Pearson-Adams

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is designed to accompany the book Just Start. Each section corresponds to a chapter and its To Do List, expanded with guided prompts, worksheets, and space for your reflections.

You don't need to do everything at once. Move at your own pace. Some exercises will take a week. Some will take a month. Some are designed to become lifelong practices.

Use a pen. There's something about writing by hand that makes a commitment more real. But if typing works better for you, that's fine too. The important thing is that you're doing the work.

Come back to these pages. This isn't a one-time exercise. Revisit your answers after a month, three months, a year. See what's changed. See what hasn't. That's where the real learning lives.

SECTION 1

Getting Out of Your Own Way

Corresponds to Chapter 2

Exercise 1.1: Fear & Doubt Inventory

Time: 7 days. No longer.

This is the first exercise for a reason. Before you can move forward, you need to know what's holding you back. Not in a vague sense — specifically. On paper.

Part A: What Am I Afraid Of?

List the specific fears that are keeping you stuck. Be honest. No one else is going to read this.

#	The fear	Where does it come from?	How long has it been here?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Reflection questions:

- Which of these fears is based on something that has actually happened to you before?
- Which is based on something you've only imagined?
- If you removed fear from the equation, what would you do differently right now?

Part B: The Evidence Test

For each fear you listed above, ask yourself: What is the actual evidence that this will happen?

Fear	Evidence it will happen	Evidence it won't	Verdict
Example: I'll fail if I try	I failed once before, 5 years ago	I've succeeded many times since then	The evidence doesn't support this fear
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Part C: The Worst Case Scenario

Pick the fear that feels biggest. Now describe the absolute worst-case scenario if you acted despite it.

The fear:

The worst that could happen:

How likely is this? (1-10):

If it did happen, could you recover?

☐ Yes, fully

☐ Yes, but it would take time

☐ Maybe

☐ Probably not

☐ No

What would you do to recover?

Michael's note: I've done this exercise more times than I can count. Every single time, the worst-case scenario I imagined was worse than anything that actually happened. The thing about fear is that it's a storyteller, and it's not a reliable one. Write it down. Look at it on paper. It usually shrinks.

Exercise 1.2: Previous Goals Assessment

Time: 14 days. No longer.

Before you set new goals, take stock of the ones you've already set — achieved or not.

Part A: Goal History

List the significant goals you've set for yourself in the last 3-5 years.

Goal	Achieved?	Abandoned?	Why?

Part B: The Pattern

Look at your answers above. What patterns do you see?

Goals I tend to achieve have this in common:

Goals I tend to abandon have this in common:

What does this tell me about how I should set goals going forward?

Part C: Comfort Zone Map

Draw or describe the boundaries of your current comfort zone. What's inside it? What's just outside it? What's far outside it?

Inside my comfort zone (I do this regularly with no fear):

Just outside my comfort zone (I could do this with some effort):

Far outside my comfort zone (this scares me):

Exercise 1.3: Find Your Accountability Buddy

Time: 30 days.

This is the hardest exercise in this section because it requires you to be vulnerable with another person. Do it anyway.

Step 1: Who?

List 3-5 people who could be your accountability buddy. Consider: do they follow through on their own commitments? Are they honest with you? Do they have time?

Name	Why them?	Potential concern

Step 2: The Conversation

When you ask them, be specific. Here's a script if you need one:

"I'm working on making some changes in my life and I need someone to help keep me accountable. Would you be willing to check in with me regularly — maybe once a week for 15 minutes — and ask me how I'm progressing on my goals? I need someone who will be honest with me, not just nice. If this doesn't work for you, I completely understand."

Who I asked:

Their response:

Date of commitment:

Step 3: The Agreement

Set the terms of your accountability relationship.

How often will we check in? (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly)

What format? (call, text, in person, video)

What will I report on?

What do I want them to do if I'm slipping?

- ☐ Call me out directly
 - ☐ Ask gentle questions
 - ☐ Remind me why I started
 - ☐ Help me problem-solve
 - ☐ Just listen
-

Accountability Check-In Template

Use this for each check-in with your buddy.

Date:

What I committed to since last check-in:

What I actually did:

What got in the way:

What I'm committing to next:

One thing I need help with:

SECTION 2

Pre-Goal Preparation — Life SWOT

Corresponds to Chapter 4

Time: 30 days.

This is the most important planning exercise in the book. Don't rush it. A proper SWOT analysis for a business takes weeks. Your life deserves at least that much attention.

Exercise 2.1: Strengths

What are you naturally good at?

Don't be modest. This isn't bragging — it's data.

Skills & Abilities

List the skills you have, whether they're professional, personal, or entirely random.

Skill	How proficient? (1-10)	Do I enjoy it?	Could I teach it?

Knowledge

What do you know more about than the average person?

Personal Qualities

What personality traits serve you well? (e.g., persistence, empathy, curiosity, patience)

What Others Say

Ask 2-3 people who know you well: What do you think I'm good at?

Person	Their answer	Surprised me?

My top 5 strengths (synthesised from all of the above):

Exercise 2.2: Weaknesses

This is the hardest part. Be brutally honest.

Not "I'm too hardworking" — that's a strength dressed up as a weakness. Real weaknesses. The things that actually hold you back.

Skills Gaps

What do I need to learn or improve?

Patterns

What do I tend to avoid, procrastinate on, or do poorly?

Feedback

What have others told me I need to work on?

The Honest List

My real weakness	How does it affect me?	Could I improve this?	Am I willing to?

My top 3 weaknesses to work on:

Exercise 2.3: Opportunities

What possibilities exist right now that you're not taking advantage of?

Think broadly: career, relationships, learning, location, technology, timing.

External Opportunities

Opportunity	What would it take to pursue it?	Am I interested?	Why haven't I?

Internal Opportunities

What could you develop within yourself that would open doors?

Hidden Opportunities

What seems like a problem right now that could actually be an opportunity in disguise?

The opportunity I'm most excited about:

What's one small step I can take toward it this week?

Exercise 2.4: Threats

What could get in your way?

These aren't excuses — they're realities. Naming them gives you power over them.

External Threats

Threat	How likely? (1-10)	Can I influence it?	If yes, how?

Internal Threats

Threat (habit, tendency, fear)	How likely? (1-10)	How will I manage it?

Risk Mitigation

The threat I'm most concerned about:

My plan to address it:

What would I do if this threat actually materialised?

Exercise 2.5: SWOT Summary

Now bring it all together.

Strengths	Weaknesses
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

Opportunities	Threats
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

Opportunities	Threats
5.	5.

Strategy Questions

- How can I use my strengths to take advantage of my opportunities?
- How can I use my strengths to mitigate my threats?
- What weaknesses do I need to address to pursue my opportunities?
- Which threats require immediate attention?

One Thing

Based on this SWOT, the single most important thing I need to focus on right now is:

SECTION 3**You Are Not a Fake**

Corresponds to Chapter 6

Exercise 3.1: Create Your "READ ME WHEN YOU FEEL FAKE" Document

This is the most practical tool in the book. Michael keeps his on his phone, at the top of his dashboard. You should keep yours wherever you'll see it when you need it most.

Instructions

Write this document for yourself. Include the sections below. Be specific. Be generous. This is not the time for modesty.

Section A: Achievements

List everything you've achieved that you're proud of. No achievement is too small.

Professional / Career Achievements:

Personal / Private Achievements:

Things I've overcome:

Compliments I've received that I didn't know how to accept:

Risks I took that paid off:

Times I helped someone else:

Times I kept going when I wanted to quit:

Other achievements:

Section B: Fears I've Conquered

What used to scare you that doesn't anymore?

Fear	When did I face it?	How did I do it?

Section C: Battles I've Won

What personal struggles have you overcome?

Challenge	How I got through it	What I learned

Section D: Evidence I Belong Here

List facts that prove you're capable. Things you've done. Skills you have. Challenges you've met.

Three facts that prove I'm not a fake:

Final Document Format

Once you've written all of the above, condense it into a single-page document you can read in 2 minutes. Keep it on your phone, in your wallet, or on your wall. Title it:

"READ ME WHEN I FEEL FAKE"

Write the final version here:

Exercise 3.2: The Imposter Audit

When you feel imposter syndrome creeping in, run this quick audit.

What triggered this feeling?

Is there evidence I actually don't belong here, or am I assuming?

What would I tell a friend who felt this way?

What does my "READ ME WHEN I FEEL FAKE" document say?

What's one small action I can take right now to move forward anyway?

SECTION 4

The Paper Plate Method

Corresponds to Chapter 8

Exercise 4.1: Big Goal Plates

You'll need: Paper plates (dinner size and appetiser size), permanent marker, blue tack or tape.

Step 1: Identify Your Big Goals

What are the major goals you want to achieve? These are your dinner-plate goals — big enough that they'll take significant time and effort.

Goal 1:

Target date:

What achieving this would mean to me:

Goal 2:

Target date:

What achieving this would mean to me:

Goal 3:

Target date:

What achieving this would mean to me:

Step 2: Break Goals into Steps

For each big goal, list the smaller steps needed to get there. Each step goes on an appetiser plate.

Goal 1 Steps:

Step	Target date	Status
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done

Goal 2 Steps:

Step	Target date	Status
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done

Goal 3 Steps:

Step	Target date	Status
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done
		☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Done

Step 3: Write Your Plates

Now write each big goal on a dinner plate and each step on an appetiser plate. Use a permanent marker.

Arrangement: Place the dinner plate in the centre. Arrange the appetiser plates around it like satellites. This shows you visually that every small step is connected to the big goal.

Location: Put them where you'll see them every day. Michael uses his en suite wall. Find your spot.

Date I put them up:

Where they are:

Exercise 4.2: The Weekly Plate Review

Every week, spend 5 minutes reviewing your plates. Use this template.

Date:

Steps completed this week:

Step	Goal it belongs to	How it felt

Step	Goal it belongs to	How it felt

Steps I'm stuck on:

Step	What's blocking me	What I'll try

Did I cross anything off? [] Yes [] No

If yes, how did it feel?

One thing I'll do next week to move forward:

Exercise 4.3: The Monthly Plate Review

Date:

Goals progress review:

Goal	Progress (1-10)	On track?	Needs adjustment?

Steps to adjust:

New steps needed:

Steps to abandon (if any):

What I've learned about myself this month:

SECTION 5

Mental Health

Corresponds to Chapter 10

Exercise 5.1: Daily Check-In

This takes 2 minutes. Do it every day if you can. Even every other day helps.

Date:

Energy level (1-10):

Mood (1-10):

Sleep hours last night:

What went well today:

What was hard today:

One thing I'm grateful for:

What I need right now:

Exercise 5.2: Weekly Mental Health Review

Date:

This week's wins:

This week's challenges:

Self-care I practised:

Self-care I skipped:

Stress level this week (1-10):

What helped me manage stress:

One boundary I set this week:

One boundary I wish I'd set:

Someone I connected with meaningfully:

Someone I should reach out to:

Next week, I want to prioritise:

Exercise 5.3: Boundaries Worksheet

Situation where I need a boundary:

What I will say or do:

What I will no longer accept:

What I will do if this boundary is crossed:

Who I need to communicate this to:

Date I will communicate it:

Exercise 5.4: Stress Management Plan

My top 3 stress triggers:

Techniques that work for me:

Technique	When to use it	How well it works (1-10)
Box breathing		
Walking		
Journaling		
Calling a friend		
Other:		

My emergency de-stress plan (for when stress hits hard):

Step 1:

Step 2:

Step 3:

Exercise 5.5: Gratitude Practice

Each day, write one thing you're grateful for. No repeats for 30 days.

Day	I'm grateful for...
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	

Day	I'm grateful for...
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	
29	
30	

Exercise 5.6: Support Network Map

Circle of Trust — Who can I call at 3am?

Name	What I'd call them for	Last contact

Professional Support

Type	Name/Org	Contact	Used recently?
Therapist			
Doctor			
Helpline			

SECTION 6

AI & The Machine — Your Action Plan

Corresponds to Chapter 5.5

Exercise 6.1: AI Audit

What tasks am I currently using AI for?

Task	Is it enabling or educating me?	Should I change how I use it?

Where could I benefit from more hands-on learning?

Where could I benefit from more AI assistance?

My AI rule for myself:

SECTION 7

And Then What? — The Next Thing

Corresponds to Chapter 12

Exercise 7.1: Post-Goal Reflection

Use this when you've achieved a goal.

Goal achieved:

Date achieved:

How I celebrated:

What I learned about myself:

What I miss about the pursuit:

What I'm glad is over:

Who helped me get here:

Who I want to thank:

Exercise 7.2: The Recalibration

After every goal, take time to recalibrate before setting the next one.

What I want more of:

What I want less of:

What I'm curious about now:

What scared me but I want to try anyway:

What I need to rest from:

My next goal — if any — will be:

Final Page: The Commitment

Date:

I am starting.

Not when I'm ready. Not when I'm less scared. Not when everything is perfect.

Now.

My one commitment to myself (write it as if you've already achieved it):

Signature:

Much love,

MPA

Just start. What's the worst that could happen?