

# PROFESSIONAL CORNER

JANUARY 2025

## THIS YEAR, BUILD A BETTER YOU IN JUST FIVE MINUTES A DAY

Disclaimer - For the past few months, I've been writing about how to be a more inclusive leader and build more inclusive teams. I'll continue that series next month, but with New Year's here – and the flood of goalsetting all around us – I felt it was the perfect time to talk about habits.

It's that time of year again. New Year's. The season of fresh starts, bold promises, and lofty goals. We tell ourselves, "This is it. This is the year I finally get it together." We set big goals – eat healthier, get in shape, learn a new language – and maybe even feel a jolt of excitement about what's possible.

But if we're being honest, most of us know how this story ends. By February, the excitement fades, and the bold promises start to unravel. The gym gets a little less crowded. The language apps go unopened. And that "brand new me" we envisioned starts to feel more like same old me.

I know this cycle all too well. Over the years, I've set big goals for myself. Some I've conquered, like running. I'm now a regular long-distance runner, but it didn't start that way. Other goals, like learning Danish, have been messier. I've been working at it for nearly a decade, but I still hesitate to call myself a "Danish speaker." And this year, I'm adding a new goal to the list – one that feels embarrassingly simple but, for some reason, I've failed at before: flossing my teeth every day. I'm a grown man, and it's time I figured this one out.

If you've been stuck in this cycle of big goals and quiet failures, you're not alone. The problem isn't that our goals are too big. It's that our approach is all wrong. Real improvement – whether it's personal or professional – doesn't come from giant leaps. It comes from small, steady progress. This year at work and at home, I'm trying something different. I'm not just chasing goals. I'm chasing **habits** – the kind that shift your identity and build momentum every day.

### Why Habits Matter More Than Goals

If you've ever set a big goal – like "Become a better leader," "Get promoted," or "Finally learn Danish," you've probably felt that initial rush of motivation. But here's the problem: Motivation is fickle. It shows up strong in the beginning, but it fades fast. And once it's gone, all you're left with is the same goal staring back at you, feeling even bigger than before.

That's why goals alone don't work. They sound good on paper, but they rely too much on willpower and perfect conditions. And if you've ever waited for the "perfect moment" to work on your goals, you already know how that turns out. True progress doesn't happen in one giant leap. It happens through small, repeatable actions that build up over time. That's where **habits** come in.

Habits are different. While goals focus on the finish line, habits focus on the starting line. Habits don't rely on willpower – they rely on momentum. And when you build momentum, everything else gets easier. Instead of waiting for a breakthrough moment, you're stacking small wins every day. The result? The "big goal" you once dreamed about eventually takes care of itself.

If you want to make real progress this year, you don't just need better goals. You need better habits. And to create better habits, you need two critical tools. The first is something most people overlook: **Identity Shift**. The second is what I like to call **The 5-Minute Snowball**. Master these two tools, and you'll build habits that last.

### Tool #1 – Identity Shift

If you want to create real, lasting change, you have to start with identity. It's not enough to say, "I want to run a marathon" or "I want to be a better leader." You have to start thinking of yourself as a runner or as a great leader from day one – not after you "earn" it.

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Here's the mistake most people make. They think identity comes after the achievement. "Once I finish the marathon, I'll be a runner." Or, "Once I get the necessary training, I'll be a great leader." But that's backwards. If you wait until the finish line to claim your identity, you're making it 10 times harder to stick with the habits that get you there.

When I first started running, I didn't feel like a runner. I felt like a guy who wished he were a runner. Every run felt like a struggle. I didn't look like a runner, and I definitely didn't run like one. But somewhere along the way, I made a decision. I told myself, "I am a runner." Not, "I will be" – but "I am." And that shift changed everything. I didn't have to wait until I finished a 5K race. I was a runner the moment I laced up my shoes and hit the pavement.

That shift in identity wasn't just a mental trick – it made the behavior easier. Instead of having to "push" myself to go for a run, I started thinking, "What would a runner do?" And the answer was simple: A **runner runs**. That shift from "trying to be a runner" to "I am a runner" was the difference between a temporary hobby and a lasting habit.

This concept applies to every area of growth – at home and at work. If you want to be a better leader, you don't wait for everyone to acknowledge you as a great leader. You start acting like a great leader today. If you want to be a Danish speaker, you don't wait for fluency. You claim it the first time you have a simple conversation. You may not be a great Danish speaker, but you are a Danish speaker. And the moment you claim that identity, it changes the way you act.

So here's the challenge: **What identity are you waiting to claim?** Write it down. Are you waiting to "become" a leader, a runner, a better parent, or a better communicator? Stop waiting. Claim it today. Don't wait for someone to give you permission or for some milestone to "prove" it. If you've taken action – even once – then you already are.

### Tool #2 – The 5-Minute Snowball

If you've ever waited for the "perfect moment" to start something big, you already know how that story ends with nothing happening. We wait for the ideal day to work on our development plan, the perfect afternoon to sit down and learn a new skill, or that magical moment when we feel 100% ready. But here's the truth: that moment never comes. And the longer we wait, the more impossible it feels to start.

That's why you don't wait. You start with **five minutes**. That's it. No grand gestures. No massive time commitments. Just five minutes.

For me, one of the best examples of this is learning to speak Danish. I've been working on it for nearly a decade, and while I've made progress, I can't say I've truly mastered it. One of the biggest mistakes I made was focusing on big moments – like having a long, fluent, hour-long conversation in Danish. But waiting for those "big moments" created more pressure than progress. If I didn't have time for a long session, I wouldn't do anything at all. And every missed day made the next one harder.

So this year, I'm doing it differently. I'm starting with just five minutes a day. Not an hour. Not even 30 minutes. Just five. If I can do more, great. But if all I get is five minutes, that's still a win. Because it's not about cramming it all into one big conversation. It's about showing up every day. It's about building consistency.

Here's the part people get wrong about the 5-minute snowball: it's not **five minutes forever**. It's five minutes to start. That's how it was with running too. My only goal in the beginning was to run for five minutes. Just five. It didn't matter how fast I went or how far I got. Five minutes was the whole objective. But over time, something happened. The snowball started to roll. Five minutes turned into ten. Ten turned into twenty. And now, I'm running multiple times a week for much longer stretches. The same thing happens with any habit. Five minutes in the beginning feels like a big deal. But once you get going, it becomes easier to keep going.

That's why the 5-minute snowball works: **Action creates momentum. Momentum creates more action.** And momentum is way more powerful than motivation. Motivation might get you to try something for a day, but momentum keeps you going for weeks, months, or even years. When you do five minutes every day, you start to build a streak. And once you have a streak, you don't want to break it. That is why five



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minutes every day beats one big effort once a week. It's not about how much you do in five minutes – it's about proving to yourself, every day, that you show up.

If you're thinking about your own growth – at work or at home – ask yourself this: **What could you do for five minutes a day that would change everything in a year?** Maybe it's five minutes of writing to become a better communicator. Five minutes of learning a new tool for work. Five minutes of listening to your team before offering a solution. The specific habit doesn't matter. What matters is that you start. Push the snowball. Five minutes today. Five minutes tomorrow. That's all it takes.

### Creating Your Own Lasting Habits

I've learned these lessons the hard way. With running, I didn't wait until I finished a marathon to call myself a runner. I claimed that identity from day one, and it made every run easier. With Danish, I made the opposite mistake. I told myself I'd be a Danish speaker "once I was fluent." But after nearly a decade of learning, I'm finally shifting my approach. I'm claiming the identity now – not later. And I'm using the 5-minute snowball to make it stick, speaking Danish for at least five minutes a day.

But this year, I'm taking these lessons to an even simpler, more honest challenge: **flossing my teeth**. It's embarrassing to admit, but I've struggled with this habit for years. I've tried. I've failed. I've made excuses. But not this year. This year, I'm claiming the identity. "I am someone who flosses." No waiting for streaks. No perfection required. I'm starting with five minutes. Not because flossing takes five minutes (it doesn't), but because it's about showing up every day. Push the snowball. Build the streak. Let momentum do the rest.

So here's my challenge for you. **What habit are you ready to start?** What identity have you been waiting to claim? Are you waiting for some finish line to call yourself a leader, a writer, a better communicator, or a runner? Stop waiting. You're already there. If you've taken action – even once – then you already are. Write it down. "I am a \_\_\_\_." Fill in the blank. Claim the identity now. Not later. And then, start with five minutes. That's it. Just five. Push the snowball. Once it starts rolling, you'll be surprised how quickly it grows.

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