

(Not So) Final Thoughts Of The Month: Holiday Cheer! BAH, HUMBUG!

By Nic "Scroogin' It" Peterson

"And the data backs me up; with 93% of resolutions failing by February, and Q1 is typically 30-50% less productive than Q4."

- Lukas, a few pages ago

First, how about that zero report? I've been searching for a way to appreciate when bad things don't happen for years and then BOOM, Dave Burg drops the zero report on us. Anyway...

I'm gonna be honest...I'm not a big fan of December or January. Let me explain, starting with a question.

What is on either side of a peak, *always and without fail*?

A valley. There is no peak in existence that does not have a relative valley on either side of it. Since there has never been a peak that was not followed by a valley...

...what would be the most reasonable thing to expect following euphoria, or any other manufactured emotional peak? (Hint: the 'honeymoon' phase is used a warning for a reason)

An emotional valley. I don't get as much joy out of December as most people do. And it's not because I'm Scroogin' it. I don't think so, anyway. Instead I am burdened with the ability to see relative change, dynamic complexities, and have a basic understanding of **regression toward the mean**. I can't tell you the number of times I have heard a version of:

"Can't you just let me live in the moment and be happy for once!?"

What they are really asking is for me to behave in a way that not only allows them to live in the momentary delusion, but to add to their euphoria. *To contribute to an even greater manufactured emotional peak*. And I refuse.

Because on either side of a peak is always a valley.

And, regression toward the mean tells us that the higher that peak, the more precipitous the fall. The emotional crash contributes to low productivity levels, depression, apathy and list of failed resolutions.

It's not because things are bad. It's because things *feel* so bad relative to the momentary, manufactured emotional high from just a few days, weeks or months ago.

So when I see emotional volatility in others, people drunk on temporary euphoria, it sucks the joy out of me. (Remember, volatility goes both ways).

But like I said, I'm not Scroogin' it. I want you, and everyone else, to be truly happy and fulfilled - all year long. The more emotional peaks you manufacture for yourself, the more difficult it becomes to sustain happiness.

One place to start is to develop a new way to set and achieve goals. It's one of those things that's not sexy, until it is. In this month's Letter I'm sharing my personal goal setting system. I hope you find it useful.

- Nic

My Personal Goal Achievement Behavior Modification Framework

By Nic Peterson

Full disclosure: I don't set New Year's Resolutions.

Most of them are arbitrary goals on arbitrary timelines; a great strategy to turn yourself into a ticking time bomb. I do, however, strategically modify my own behavior in an attempt to increase the probability of favorable things happening to me using a five-step behavior modification process.

My brain maps everything to familiar shapes and frameworks, so this process is mapped to Maslow's Hierarchy. Like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the requirements of the lower levels must be met before focusing on the level above it.

For example, one cannot achieve safety (personal security, income or resources) if one does not have access to food, water or air. That makes access to food, water and air (the physiological needs) by far the most important thing to focus on achieving. Because if you can't meet those basic needs... *nothing else matters.*



The pyramid structure implies a few things:

1. The lower level tiers have a greater surface area because the returns are far greater. You can live without being self-actualized, you cannot live without water or air. In other words, the returns diminish as you climb levels or tiers. *This is super important to understand when setting goals.* Highlight it, I'll circle back to tie it all together shortly.
2. The lower the tier, the more of the foundation it makes up, making it *more* important to the entire structure. Lower tier = more important. Our brains sometimes struggle with that concept. Skipping steps is like trying to build the tallest skyscraper possible, starting at the top and without a foundation. (It's probably not gonna work out the way you want)

Read through the above section a few times, I'm cramming a lot into the next few pages. It won't make much sense without being on the same page about the above. (This will become a mini-book you'll get later on). Okay, here we go:

The Behavior Modification Pyramid

Maslow's hierarchy of needs has "Physiological" needs at the base. Without them, *nothing else will matter*. When it comes to making meaningful changes in our lives, what is the thing that needs to be true or nothing else will matter?

In my experience it's:



ENOUGH:

How much of a thing do we need to do?

Regardless of your goal there is a certain amount of *something* necessary. If you do too little or too much, *nothing else will matter*. Want some examples? K.

- If you're eating far too little or far too many calories, it doesn't really matter what the food choices are. Macronutrients, meal timing, supplements, rigid eating schedules... *none of those will move the needle for you if you're grossly over or under eating.*
- If you're starting an organic video campaign you might put a lot of time, effort and resources into worrying about what to say, how to say it, how to edit it, production quality, and things like the timing of posting videos. If you can't sit down and get the number of videos you need done, *none of that stuff will matter.*
- If you're trying to close more sales calls for your business, nothing will move the needle for you unless you have enough conversations on the calendar.

It might seem like common sense, but it's not common practice. Until you have 1) figured out what enough is and 2) consistently achieved it, it doesn't make sense (to me) to do anything other than work on "enough". Because *until you figure that out, nothing else will matter*. Using the examples above:

If your plan is to eat an average 2,500 calories a day, focus on that and just that until you average 2,500 calories a day. At the end of the week, if you've failed, explore the reasons you were not able to do it, remove the obvious constraints and then try again.

Rinse and repeat until your behavior actually matches the plan, because until then, *nothing else matters*.

Until you have removed the constraints preventing you from consistently doing “enough”, how can you justify putting resources into doing other things? Especially since “other things will almost certainly have diminished returns.

If your plan is to make three videos a week or have five sales calls a day, don’t worry about the content of your video or your sales script. For realz. Not until you have evidence that you can consistently make three videos a week or get five conversations a day. Because if you can’t... *nothing else will matter*.

What you’re doing is building a foundation of skill and behavior until it becomes engraved in you. Once it’s engraved as a habit it becomes significantly easiest to maintain, allowing you to redirect resources to the next thing.

Once you consistently achieve “enough” you can move up a tier, if you choose:



BALANCE:

How is “enough” distributed?

Once we have developed the habit of doing “enough” of something, we can focus on the distribution of the “enough”. Need examples, again? K.

- Once you consistently eat an average of 2,500 calories per day, you can change the distribution of those calories. For example: Average 2,500 calories per a day, with at least 180 grams of protein. ***If you can't figure out “enough” (calories) consistently, there is no way in hell you will be able to figure out “enough” (calories) and “balance” (macronutrient distribution) simultaneously.*
- Once you consistently make three videos a week, you can start to tweak the kind of content. For example, three videos a week and one that makes a strong offer. ***If you can't figure out how to get three videos published, there is no way in hell you'll be able to figure out how to get three videos published while also being specific about what they need to be.*
- Once you can reliably get five sales calls a day, you can practice the different methods you've learned. ***You get it by now.*

If you're successful in implementing the first step of balance, you can add another if you choose. Examples:

- 2,500 calories, at least 180 grams of protein *and less than 40g of fat.*
- Three videos a week, one call to action video, *and one humorous video to show off personality*

The key here is that you take the smallest step possible *and then prove to yourself that you can do it.* If you can't do it, that's okay. You need to know that so that you can remove the limits to achieving it before adding complications. Hang with me here, I promise this will make sense soon.

Once you have earned your way to the balance you want, you can move up another tier, if you choose:



Structure

Adding Structure To The System

STRUCTURE:

Adding structure to the system.

Once you've mastered enough and have a sustainable balance, you can choose to add structure. Examples? K.

- Once you consistently eat 2,500 calories per a day, with at least 180 grams of protein and less than 40 grams of fat, *you can set meal times to be the same every day.*
- Once you are making three videos a week with one call to action video and one humorous video, *you can commit to a posting schedule and a filming schedule.*

A lot of people start with structure, which is a reason a lot of people fail. Building a structure around something with no evidence it can be done consistently is a recipe for anxiety. For example, a lot of people will start the new year with something like this:

"I downloaded this new diet, I'm going to eat 2,200 calories a day, eliminate alcohol, eat six meals per day and get at least 120 grams of protein in each meal."

...with zero experience in doing any of the things that make up the plan. Uh. *Do you have any idea how difficult it is to learn how to do ANY of those things consistently, let alone all of them at the same time?* Building structure before it is necessary decreases flexibility tremendously. Start ups are applauded when they are lean and agile; when they have less structure, which allows them to account for the unknown and unexpected.

Think of your new goal or initiative as a start-up. Don't add structure until you have mastered "enough" and "balance" - otherwise whatever structure you create and commit to is just a guess. Guessing is rarely the best plan. Before we move onto the next tier...

**... I am going to give you a pro-tip
(It's Top-Secret):**

I know you want to jump straight to the more complicated stuff. I get it. With this model, you can get there quickly. Here's how:

Week 1: Prove you can do enough 100% of the time

Week 2: Prove you can maintain enough, but with the desired balance 100% of the time

Week 3: Add structure while maintaining enough and balance.

In other words, if you think you can handle the complicated stuff, great... earn it through your behavior.

And the harsh reality of it is this:

If you cannot sustain "enough" for a couple of weeks, *what on earth makes you think you can sustain anything more complicated for any amount of time?* Again, if you want to do more complicated stuff, earn it. If you can't earn the next step (through your behavior), put all your effort and resources into the current step until you can.

Not because I'm a stickler, but *because the returns diminish as you climb tiers*. Mastering a lower tier will have a greater impact on your results than jumping up a tier will.

The right number of calories, alone, will produce better results than the best timed meals and supplement protocol in the world if you are grossly over or under eating.

Now...diminished returns are still returns, so onward we forge:



NOVELTY:

Do Your Thing (make it interesting).

Once you have a structure in place that works for you consistently, introduce some novelty. You know the whole “master the rules so you can break the rules” thing? That’s novelty. At this point, you are sustaining enough, it’s balanced and has a structure. Since all of those things are true, you can isolate variables and have some fun or introduce some variety. More examples:

- You’re eating an average of 2,500 calories a day, with a protein minimum and max fat goal. Maybe by now you have all three of your macronutrients dialed in. *Can you fit a beer in? What about squeezing in a couple ice cream cones with your kids?*
- You’re making your videos on schedule consistently, *what happens if you push the boundaries on the humorous video? What happens if you make that video you’ve been thinking about making but since it has nothing to do with your offer, you haven’t made it?*

By developing the skills, behaviors and structure to sustain the foundational stuff, you have given yourself the ability to try new things in a safe, controlled environment. You can break the rules, because you have mastered them.

And then, if you choose, you can bump yet another tier. Like Maslow’s “Self-actualization” it appears to be the sexiest tier. In reality, it’s the most complicated and the lowest returns. But again, diminished returns *are* still returns so....



COMPLICATED STUFF

Exactly What It Sounds Like

Supplements, meal-timing, advanced and complicated funnels, tripwires, NLP techniques, etc. That’s all complicated stuff.

Complicated stuff requires significantly more energy for much smaller returns. In my experience, most people fail because they start their “resolutions” with complicated stuff baked in from the start. The juice is not worth the squeeze, so they quit, unaware that most of the juice is coming from the basics and most of the squeeze is going into the complicated stuff.

That’s a goofy feedback loop.

Here’s the kicker.

Unless you're an Olympic athlete, the extra 1-2% you get from "complicated stuff" will probably not change your life in a meaningful way.

And the whole purpose of The Letter is to improve your life in a meaningful way. So the objective is not to make it to the top and stay there. The objective is to master each step and spend time in a state of receptivity as you go through it...

So that you can determine at which step you are living your best life.

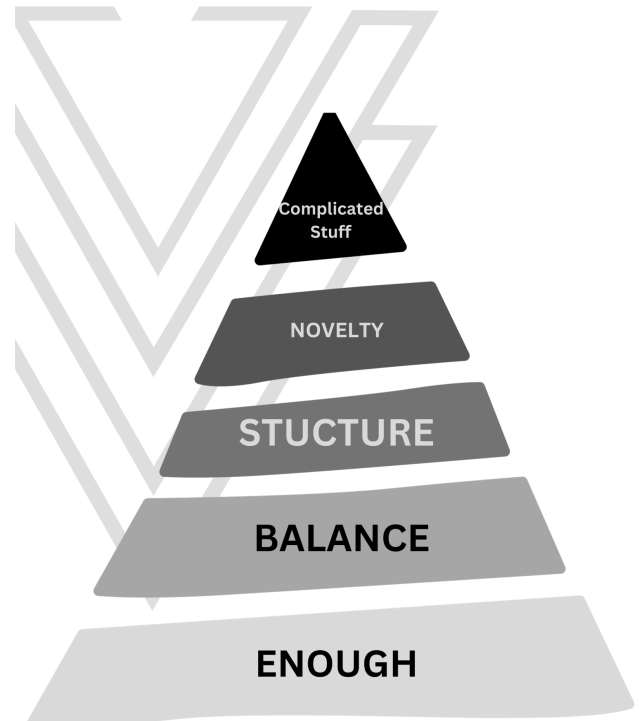
What most "resolutioners" do is live their life like on a giant yo-yo diet cycle. They go "all-in" and try everything at once, get overwhelmed and then swing back to complete chaos.

Your best life is almost certainly not at either extreme, but somewhere in between. By methodically going through each step and staying receptive, you will be able to discern what is most sustainable and enjoyable for you. I can't tell you the answer, I don't know your sweet spot.

What I can tell you is that an overly rigid and arbitrary plan starting on a completely arbitrary date (like Jan. 1) is likely going to prevent you from discovering it. You have to go through your process and experience it.

It's a vibe thing.

I know it's a lot. Don't worry, mini-book incoming. In the meantime, I did a video breakdown of this for Nicsmas 2020. The mini-book will be far better than the replay, but the replay is available to Letter subscribers:



v3letter.com/v3pyramid

You certainly don't have to adopt my process. Or Lukas' process. But I hope this Letter gave you something to think about.

- Nic

PS: Please do not mistake my examples as being prescriptive. "Enough" is different for each person, their personalities, their goals, their unique disposition, starting position and desired

outcome are all unique to them. This is getting dangerously close to becoming a rant about "group indexing" and online calculators or cookie cutter plans.

TDL;DR: Just don't.

The Back Cover
Things You Probably Already Know
...but may have forgotten

The V3 Pyramid

it's a vibe thing.

