

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 105: 5 Morning Rituals That Help Me Win the Day

Show notes and links at tim.blog/podcast

“If you win the morning, you win the day”

This is Tim Ferriss. Sorry for that bit of inspiration from the animal realm. I'm reading a book by Joseph Campbell. It's actually a collection of volumes, *The Way of the Animal Powers: Historical Outlets of World Mythologies the First*. It's massive but really amazing and nobody besides Joseph Campbell really could've written this book, I don't think, but I digress.

This episode of the Tim Ferriss Show is a bit of an experiment. Typically I interview people who are world class at what they do and I ask them many, many questions to try to pull out, to tease out the tactics, tools, habits, routines, etcetera that make them very good at what they do. And you have, as listeners, asked me many times, why don't you answer your own questions? And I wanted to answer one of them that I get asked a lot, and that is, what does your morning routine look like? What do the first 60 to 90 minutes of your day look like? So I'm gonna answer that and you can let me know if you like this type of short episode. So hit me up on Twitter or Facebook Twitter at TFerriss T-F-E-R-R-I-S-S or on Facebook Facebook.com/TimFerriss with two Rs and two Ss and let me know if you like this, want more of them, hate them, never want me to do one again, whatever.

So I am going to describe the five things that I do every morning. Now the five things I do every morning would be on an ideal day. And the reality is if I hit three out of these five, I've won the morning. And if you win the morning, you win the day. And I'm not the first person to say that but I think it is a good encapsulation of how to think about morning routines. It is setting up your entire day for positive momentum and fewer distractions.

Number one, let's get started, meow. Number one is you make your bed. And I had not done this for my entire life and then chanced upon meeting a gentleman, a monk from India named Dandapani and his website is Dandapani.org. I met him at Master Mind Talks in Toronto in 2011 and he convinced me to start making my bed. And I was going through a very scattered period in my life at that point. I felt like my energy was traveling sort of a millimeter in a million directions and wasn't being harnessed properly. And he convinced me to start making my bed.

And if a monk is too much for you, if that's too woo-woo, number one I would say, open your mind, you savage. But number two I would say this is a common belief among

many, very high achieving military tacticians and folks who have been deployed. For instance, Naval Admiral William McRaven. He has spoken about this in commencement speeches. And I'll just read his explanation first. This is from a University of Texas at Austin commencement speech.

"If you make your bed every morning you'll have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter." Now I would add to this. I would say that in my life as a solo printer – in effect I haven't built a large organization to support me, it's a very lean team of just a few people – there's a lot of uncertainty. There are many unpredictable problems that will always pop up and there are few things that help me in that type of life.

Number one is reading, for instance, Marcus Aurelius and meditations where he prompts himself in the morning by effectively reading or writing out, I'm going to encounter many ungrateful, rude people today and I need to prepare myself for that inevitability, so not expecting the best. Preparing for the worst, hoping for the best but prompting yourself and preparing yourself mentally to address all this uncertainty and so on.

The second is to control what you can control. ***No matter how shitty your day is, no matter how catastrophic it might become, you can make your bed. And that gives you the feeling, at least gives me the feeling, even in a disastrous day, that I've held on by a fingernail off the cliff and I haven't fallen. There is something I've controlled, there is something that has maintained one hand on the driver's wheel of life. And making your bed, it's a very small thing. It doesn't have to be complicated.

All I do is I have say a blanket or a duvet. I don't tuck in the sheets and whatever. I kinda just hide it, and I think that's a typical dude move, hide it under the blanket, pull up the blanket so that the pillows are either kind of symmetrically under or on top of the blanket and you're done. That's it. It's very, very simple. And if you work from home, this serves double duty, especially if you work in or near your bedroom. ***If you see a distraction externally, again, speaking personally, you end up creating an internally distracted state. At least that's very true for me, I'm highly visual.

If I sit at a restaurant, for instance, I have to position my chair so that I'm not facing some type of TV with sports on it. I will not be able to talk to anyone. It's like taking a puppy out and having squirrels running around. I can't concentrate. So similarly, the more organized, not necessarily clean, but organized your external environment or environments that you visit repeatedly, the less stressed you will be. And that is particularly important in this case with the bookends of the day.

So you make your bed, you have accomplished that one tiny task, you've controlled something that you can absolutely control. And then at the end of the day, the last experience you have is coming back to something that you've accomplished. It's hard for me to overstate how important this ritual has become but number one, I make my bed.

Number two, I meditate and this took me a long time to start. Those of you who have listened to this podcast for some time have noticed, I'm sure, and this was not through any attempt at planning on my part, but 80 percent, I would say, or so of all over the world class performers across all the disciplines that we've covered have some type of meditative practice, whether that is in the gym or transcendental meditation. Arnold Schwarzenegger even did it for a year and then found those benefits to persist past that year. So he felt like he had sort of locked in a phase shift.

Transcendental meditation is one option, TM.org. You can check it out. There's things I dislike about it. I think that the amount they charge for the four-day initial course is too high. I think that there is some guru worship that you can steer clear of, as I did. I'm pretty secular, but it is very well tested. And the teaching method is standardized. So I found this very helpful.

And TM is focused on a mantra. And I hate that word, it's too loaded, but you basically have a sound that you repeat for a period of time with your eyes closed. You can sit comfortably or lay down. You don't have to get into the full lotus or anything like that. ***And that acts effectively as white noise to block out other thoughts. And they would probably describe this in a different way. But I will just say the practice is bringing your attention back to the mantra. So if you have a session, that is a 20-minute session, I typically meditate for 21 minutes, about a minute to get settled and then 20 minutes of meditation.

And if you think about that kid who punched you in 6th grade and the dick you have to have a conference call with at 4:00 pm that day, if you think about those types of things for 19 minutes or 19-and-a-half minutes but you notice it and bring your attention back to the mantra, that is a successful session because the muscle you're working is bringing your attention back to something. You are developing your powers of concentration and it is definitely like a muscle that needs continual conditioning and reinforcement.

So I use TM. There are other options but [inaudible] meditation, I do use some sessions where I focus on my breath but quite frankly I think the easiest place to start is either – and it doesn't have to be mutually exclusive, you could do both of these – Headspace app or Calm. Start using that in meditations. Other good guided meditations you could check out include Tara Brach B-R-A-C-H who's been on this podcast. Great episode talking about a lot of these issues and topics, and Sam Harris.

Sam Harris has a PhD in Neuroscience. I think it's just SamHarris.org H-A-R-R-I-S and he has a fantastic lecture on video about all of the sort of neuroscience and philosophy behind a lot of these practices. And that is Waking UP. So you can check out Waking Up if you like and the easiest way to find that is just to go to FourHourWorkWeek.com/vineal all spelled out. But suffice to say, I meditate first thing in the morning. Start small, rig the game so you can win it. Get in five sessions before you get too ambitious with length.

So start, for instance, if you don't wanna use any of that stuff, you could just start with a song that puts you in a good mood, sitting with your back supported somehow and listening to that song as you focus on your breathing. It could be that simple but do five days, in other words five daily sessions before you get too ambitious. You have to win those early sessions to establish it as a habit so you don't have the sort of cognitive fatigue of that particular practice, in any case.

So number two, transcendental meditation or some type of meditative practice. And if you take that ten or twenty minutes for instance, and I find with my practice, 15 minutes is just letting the mud settle and then the last five minutes are really where I get the benefit. It's much like training to failure in the gym for me. You will still get benefits out of shorter sessions. ***But if I put in those 20 minutes I will get 30 to 50 percent more done in that day with less stress. Why? Because I have already done the warm-up to avoid distraction. And if I do get distracted or interrupted I can return to my primary task more effectively. That is number two.

Number three, I hang. What does this mean? I actually hang multiple times throughout the day and at night. And this is primarily to decompress my spine and also to improve grip strength. But there are a number of people you can look to for more developed thoughts on all this. Ido Portal is one. Ido I-D-O Portal P-O-R-T-A-L. I think I've just spelled that in English. And I don't have much exposure to him but many of the listeners to this podcast have recommended him. So I did check out one of his short articles, it might've been a video, on hanging throughout the day.

And so I have a rig that I built in my backyard which is one-and-a-quarter inch. I would probably recommend most people start with 1" diameter galvanized pipe. And I bought this from plumbing supply and I built the pull-up rig outside in the span of about ten minutes and it cost, I would say, less than \$150 dollars, and is not intended for kipping, not good for kipping. But if you wanna see how I put it together, I also have some rings and then I used kayak dry bags instead of sand bags, which you can put water inside of, in fact, and use as kettle balls and so on when you're traveling instead of using them to keep things dry.

So there's a photo. You can check it out on my Instagram. Just go to [Instagram.com/TimFerriss](https://www.instagram.com/TimFerriss) with two Rs and two Ss and you can check out that rig. But I will hang by my hands throughout the day for perhaps one minute at a time just as a way of breaking up work sessions or writing sessions or fill in the blank.

At the end of the day, particularly if I do any type of weigh training that loads the spine, I will hang upside down. And I hang upside down using Teeter Hang Up Gravity boots. And these Teeter Hang Up Gravity boots cost around \$99. I actually have multiple pairs around the country so that I don't have to travel with them because they're a hassle to travel with. So I have one pair in New York, one pair in SF, one pair in LA that just lives at a gym actually lives at a gym that I go to because I don't have a home in LA.

The purpose here again is to decompress and you can work up to a point where you're even holding weights for short, short periods of time, say five seconds. The gravity boots can be dangerous so talk to your doctor – I must say this, I'm not an MD, don't blame it on the internet – before doing anything like this, particularly if you have preexisting back conditions.

Other options, so there are times when I don't wanna hang upside down. Maybe I just had a big dinner, maybe I just had a bunch to drink, don't really feel like hanging upside down by myself and perhaps getting the most miserable acid reflux of all time. In those cases or if I just don't have a place to hang upside down, I will use something called the Lynx back stretcher L-Y-N-X. And you're basically laying on the ground, locking your feet in place and then doing a dipping motion of the top range to decompress your spine, again for very short periods of time, five to seven seconds, let's say.

That is another option and people do love inversion tables. They are used widely for PT and other things. They just take up a ton of room so I don't want half of my living room taken up with an inversion table. I don't have a garage so I prefer to either use the boots, and you don't have to have your own pull-up rig of course. You can go to any CrossFit gym across the country and find a bar to hang from. Or you can use this Lynx device and I use both every day unless I have some type of injury that precludes it. So that's number three, hang.

Number four is tea. So just do a quick recap. Make my bed, sit down and meditate for 21 minutes, get up go jump up on the bar, hang for a couple of minutes, maybe go from one hand to the other, maybe do a couple of sort of toes to bar with straight legs which is a CrossFit move and then drop.

Then I go in, I throw on the tea, the kettle and I will boil water. And a lot of you tea nerds will take issue with this but that's okay. I use a very cheap kettle here. At home I have some fancier stuff from Breville, makes a very good tea preparer for instance, what makes a great kettle and they make a very good tea infuser. So if you wanna get fancy, Breville B-R-E-V-I-L-L-E has some great stuff. But for expedience, if that's a real word, and simplicity right here I have one that is called utiliTEA, utiliTEA T-E-A. And I believe that's from Adagio A-D-A-G-I-O. And I think it costs 20 to 40 bucks on Amazon. Very easy to find.

So I'll throw that on, boil water. While the water is warming up I'll prepare my tea. And the tea I typically brew in a small glass container, it's a Rishi [inaudible] R-I-S-H-I, and that'll come up again. And I use loose leaf. And it looks like a simple French press. You could, in fact, use a French press if you wanted.

And I will put in aged Pu-erh tea, P-U hyphen E-R-H. This is a black tea from China. It's very peaty, it smells kind of like a wet horse's ass. Why I know that is another story, and it's very earthy and it's an acquired taste. But I will break off a piece of this Frisbee of aged dried Pu-erh tea, drop it in there. I will also add turmeric and ginger tea. I usually get mine from Rishi but you could also just shave fresh turmeric and ginger very easily.

And I've done that before. If I'm sick I will shave fresh ginger. If I'm sick I will also add minced garlic but I'm getting ahead of myself. So we have the Pu-erh tea, we have turmeric and ginger tea. I will also add in some green tea. Now this is where the connoisseurs of tea leaves will be like, blasphemy. I need some more caffeine.

Anyway, blasphemy, blasphemer. That's where I was trying to get fancy. That's what I was gonna say. And they'll get very upset because they'll say, you know Tim Ferriss, you should really do your homework because the steeping temperatures for those teas are all different. And if you're using this blunt instrument of boiling water, you're just an idiot and giving bad advice. Well, I'll tell you what. I'm glad to be the idiot if I give people advice that's easy to follow and is the gateway drug into then exploring the complexity of tea. So let's just call a truce and keep it simple. 185 degrees is fine so I will not pour boiling water into the leaves because I can't drink boiling water and it takes too long to cool down. So I will boil it or you can set it to not boil, but I'll usually boil it and then just let it kinda sit there for say three to five minutes.

After three to five minutes, it's fine. It's a little too hot for me to stick my finger in for more than like a half a second but it's plenty hot to do what I want to do. I will then let it steep for say the first infusion I'll keep short, and some people will say, 10 to 20 seconds. Look, I mean, let's keep life simple. I'll usually do it for say a minute.

And then I will pour it into my mug and my mug will have any number of different oils in it. My favorite is coconut oil, so virgin coconut oil. I will put in my cup, it's about 70 percent by weight medium chain triglycerides. I've written a blog post called I think it's – it's a joke people – called titanium tea. The name is just a tongue in cheek joke but very similar to what you might consider bullet proof coffee. So if I have some cary gold butter or something like that I might put in a little of both. But my preference is coconut oil. I just like it and it seems to get all of my cylinders firing. So that is what I do with the tea, right. So flip it on, make it hot. I'll usually prepare my puppy's food while I'm doing that, feed the dog. And I'll do that right now by hand. Training the dog is a whole separate episode. And then I'll come back, the tea has boiled and has already cooled off, then I'll make my own tea while the dog chills in a crate and works on a Kong, if you wanna look that up, that has been frozen the night before.

But the tea, again, has Pu-erh tea, you can get all this stuff on Amazon, Pu-erh tea and I have links in the titanium tea blog post if you wanna check that out. So Pu-erh tea, the Rishi ginger and turmeric tea and than a bit of green tea. And you can choose whatever green tea you like. Dragon Well is quite tasty. If somebody wants to try that out it's long jing cha is what it is in Chinese, L-O-N-G is dragon long, jing is well, cha is tea C-H-A second tone.

So Bruce Lee, for instance, for those people interested, I'm glad you asked, is Lee Xiaolong. Lee Xiaolong is Lee, that's his last name, Xiaolong is Little Dragon. That was his nickname. There are many, many other names and action stars who have that dragon in their name. All right, I digress.

So let's go through the roll call. Make the bed, meditate, hang, make the tea, sit down with the tea and the next thing I do is journal. And there are number of different options for journaling. I usually do one and not both. There is the five-minute journal. You should check it out. It's a great little journal and it allows you to establish not only achievement for the day or expectations of achievement, because you're identifying your top priorities, you're identifying your top behaviors or attributes. So there is that component.

And then you're also establishing gratitude for what you already have or have done or the people around you. This is very important and it's easy to become obsessed with pushing the ball forward as a type A personality and you end up a perfectionist who's always future focused. The five-minute journal is a ***therapeutic intervention, for me at least because I am that person, that allows me to not only get more done during the day but to also feel better throughout the entire day, to be a happier person, to be a more content person, which is not something that comes naturally to me. I think a lot of my drive comes from constant dissatisfaction so this is very helpful medicine. The five-minute journal. You can look it up.

On a side note or maybe, I think, a very cool side note is that that journal was created as a muse by people who read the *Four Hour Work Week*. So that's a very full circle fun anecdote. The other type of journaling that I also do is Morning Pages. And I won't spend a lot of time on this but if you simply Google Tim Ferriss Morning Journal, I have actually scanned examples of my own morning journals and what those look like with the Morning Pages specifically. And I talk about why I journal, the different reasons. And one of them is, in the case of Morning Pages, is to take whatever anxiety and monkey mind self talk could interfere with the rest of the day and to trap it on the page so that I can get the fuck on with my day.

And that is it, folks. So again, these are five things but let's be realistic, I don't always hit these five because if you add them all up it's probably anywhere from 60 to 120 minutes. That's bullshit. It's maybe 60 minutes, I would say, all said and done. You know what? Why do I keep on making such large numbers? It's not true. It's like 30 to 60 minutes. And there are days when life intervenes and you have emergencies you have to deal with. But you can always do at least one of these. And if you just tick off three, I find for me personally that the likelihood of that day being a homerun is infinitely greater.

So again, you have make your bed, you have meditate and that could be very, very short, just a few minutes with an app like Headspace or Calm. Then you have hang, so you can figure out a way to hang or decompress using something like the Lynx. Then tea and then journal, whether that's five-minute journal, Morning Pages or something else.

So I hope you enjoyed this episode. That's all I have for you now and let me know if you'd like more or less or what you would like. Please let me know on Twitter @TFerriss so that's T-F-E-R-R-I-S-S on Facebook, Facebook.com/TimFerriss with two Rs and two Ss. And if you like this kind of advice or these types of findings, they types of discoveries, every Friday I send out a very short email. It's called Five Bullet Friday so it

has five bullets and it contains the coolest most useful things that I have found or been pondering that week. It's very small and it's just a dose of really useful, in some cases really hilarious stuff before you go on to the weekend. So if you're interested in that just go to FourHourWorkWeek.com/Friday. I'll spell that FourHourWorkWeek.com/Friday. Put in your email. It's free and you can check it out. And if you don't like it, unsubscribe, that's it.

All right folks, let me know what you think and as always, thank you for listening.

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